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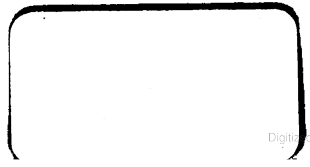

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAUGHTER.

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THE

MENTAL AND MORAL

PHILOSOPHY OF LAUGHTER:

A

VISTA OF THE LUDICROUS SIDE OF LIFE.

BY

EDWIN PAXTON HOOD,

AUTHOR OF "OLD ENGLAND," "GENIUS AND INDUSTRY," "JOHN MILTON, THE PATRIOT AND POET," ETC.

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PHILOSOPHY OF LAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE WISDOM AND MYSTERY OF LAUGHTER.

THERE is no circumstance of our life more mysterious than laughter. Sir Richard Steele has said "it is a good piece of service one man does another when he tells him the manner of his being pleased." But, surely no task is more difficult, for no mental or physical phenomena are more wonderful. Doubtless, laughter is the brother of tears, and he who smiles most will probably sigh most. The sources of all laughter and merriment are in the cordial sympathies of our nature. Laughter is very nearly related to the highest and most instinctive wisdom; it bears a high relationship among the noblest children of the brain; it stands at no distant remove from Judgment on the one hand, and Imagination on the other; and it is a

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proof of a healthy nature, for both thinking and acting. He must be regarded as a foe to man who endeavours to preach down laughter. It is so good a piece of common property that all should possess it; and when its cheerful ringing music is only upon healthy themes, it leaves no man the worse for it, and many a man much the better. The causes, the provocatives to laughter are many, and it is evident that man is intended to laugh. The love of the mirthful, the perception of the ludicrous, is natural to him, and many things assist it which will be noticed in the course of this paper. The two great causes of laughter everywhere, are wit and humour, or the ludicrous expressed, and the ludicrous exhibited; but the *chief* cause of laughter is our love of order, and beauty, and consistency. We seem to be constituted thus for laughter, as a natural consequence of our perception of the most decorous and beautiful things in nature, and viewed in this light, the ludicrous becomes the safeguard of society, a great teacher of every kind of truth. We could have no knowledge of disorder, but from our knowledge of relation and order; no knowledge of deformity, but from beauty; no knowledge of the ridiculous, but from the natural and the lovely.

In other words, the perception of resemblances and proprieties gives the perception of differences and improprieties; and literary history abound

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with instances of men who illustrate this view. Just as minds, gifted with exquisite sensibility of the beauty of tones, are most exquisitely pained by jarring notes, or as persons in whom the love of order and exactness predominates, are most shocked by disarray or disorder; so, those eyes so keen to notice the graces and beauties, the ovals and circles, and lovely shades of nature, are excited to mirth, when in their stead gracelessness and conceit, rugged angles and blots are presented to them. The poet, therefore, most exuberant and overflowing with just and admirable appreciation of delightful scenes, and thoughts, and impressions, will, by consequence, frequently overflow too with the contrastive affluence of words, moulding themselves into wit, of a mode of discourse admirably humoursome; will easily construct pictures and designs full of contraries and incongruities, but both illustrating the speaker's insight into the lovely and the natural.

The sources of laughter lie then in incongruity. This is only another name for the ludicrous and the mirth-provoking. When we speak, therefore, of one who has a keen sense of the ludicrous, what we mean is, that there is an acute perception of differences, and the cause of the laughter is the emotion of *surprise;* thus the same cause which prompts laughter in the child by some unexpected toy, or by the removal of the mask from the face,

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prompts laughter on the cheek in mature years, when hypocrisy and deceit are unmasked. All deformity is ludicrous, unless sheltered by humanity, and that, sometimes finds even superior loveliness there. Perhaps this theory of the ludicrous tends to confirm the generally received and acknowledged theory of the Beautiful; namely, that all beauty depends on the law of association; that it is the result of accustomed observations, and common combinations, and circumstances of nature; and, therefore, whatever departs from the common routine,—whatever becomes eratic is ridiculous, if it is not of sufficient magnitude to be terrible, and provokes to laughter, if it does not excite horror. We could not get on without laughter; the pools of life would become stagnant; care would be too much for us; the heart would corrode, life would be all bas relievo and no alto; our faces would assume a less cheerful aspect, and become like those of the men who never laugh; the river of Life, as we sailed over it, would be like "the lake of the Dismal Swamp," we should have to put all humanity through a revolution, we should indeed have to begin life with a sigh, and end it with a groan, while cadaverous faces and words, to the tune of "The Dead March in Saul," would make up the whole interlude of our existence.

Doubtless, a man's character may be read in his laughter. Show to us what a man laughs at, and

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how he laughs, and some estimate may be formed of the whole man. "In order to look into any person's temper," says Sir Richard Steele, "I generally make my first observation on his laugh, whether he is easily moved, and what are the passages which throw him into the agreeable kind of convulsion. People are never so much unguarded, as when they are pleased; and laughter being a visible symptom of some inward satisfaction, it is then, if ever, that you may believe the face. There is no better index to point us to the particularities of the mind, than this, which is in itself one of the most distinguishing marks of our rationality." For, as Milton says

> "Smiles from reason flow, to brutes denied,
> And are of love, the food"—

"Laughter," Sir Richard continues, "is a vent of any sudden joy that strikes upon the mind, which being too volatile and strong, breaks out in the tremor of the voice. The poets make use of this metaphor, when they would describe Nature in her richest dress, for beauty is never so lovely, as when adorned by the smile, and conversation never sits easier upon us, than when we now and then discharge ourselves in a symphony of laughter, which may not improperly be called the chorus of conversation."

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We need not follow up Sir Richard's classification of laughters into

The Dimplers;
The Smilers;
The Laughers;
The Grinners;
The Horse Grinners;

although something might still be said upon all these classes as representing character.

Now-a-days, sentimental ladies and gentlemen, have transformed the hand writing into a kind of Delphian Oracle, from whose prelections the character may be traced; but laughter shows the man. Does he wear an everlasting unmeaning simper? Does the smile glitter coldly over his face like the shining of ice? There are sniffings, titterings, husky cachinations, as if the man were laughing through wool; "from none of these," says Thomas Carlyle, "comes good. The man who cannot laugh, is not only fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; but his whole life is already a treason and a stratagem."*

Our readers have heard of the laughter of Tuefelsdrockh, "upon the proposal of Jean Paul, for a cast metal king. Gradually a light kindled in his eyes and face, a beaming, mantling, loveliest light; through those murky features a radiant ever young Apollo looked, and he burst forth like the neigh-

*Sartor Resartus.

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ing of all Tattersalls,—tears streaming down his cheeks,—pipe held aloft,—foot clutched into the air,—loud, long continuing uncontrollable; a laugh —not of the face and the diaphragm only, but of the whole man from head to heel." What think our readers of an eruption like that? No wonder if Swift ever laughed like that, (of which, however, we suppose him to have been incapable;) that he described laughter as the best and "the most innocent of all diuretics." Yet laughter, which is certainly the world's best medicine, when taken in proper doses, has like other physic, been shamefully abused. With some people, it has not been the fortieth article of their religion, but the first,—not to laugh at all;—others have made grim hyena faces, and called them laughter, although neither the intellect or the sympathies ever dictated a smile to their countenances; but to laugh truly, is to enter into the heart of a mystery, to understand character, to perceive the infinite truthfulness of Nature, and the utter folly of all unnaturalness, whether fiendish or foppish. Every faculty of man has a mission to perform; the grave and serious faculties have their tasks; the mirthful and the merry have theirs. Why lay under excommunication and interdict the fairy children of the brain? From causality and comparison,—from decision and colour, from benevolence and form, we deduce lessons of moral philosophy and natural

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theology; but there is a moral philosophy in the ludicrous, and a theology in laughter; nay, these last "hold in the hand the balance and the rod," and adjudicate to the other powers their proportions and their places.

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CHAPTER II.

THE VARIATIONS OF THE LUDICROUS.

"GIVE me the man," says Sterne, "who laughs without knowing why." Well, there are very few people who have any idea why they are pleased; very few care to look beneath the surface of laughter; and this carelessness has its philosophical and unphilosophical character. We profess to belong to the number of those who are disposed to analyse the sources both of mirth and of melancholy.—Why do we laugh? Why are we pleased? What are those hidden springs, which, when touched, give the tone to such exquisite pleasures, responding to such wonderful sensations. That man should possess the power to laugh—he alone of all animals—he who carries about with him the most wonderful weight of woe—who suffers most from sickness—he who mourns most for the loss of his loved ones—he who is the only being apparently smitten with disappointment, anxiety, and the

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perpetual weight of care—he who looks forward to the future with so much gloom—he over whom the present hangs a fearful roof of leaden-coloured sky—to whom the past is a remembered, pleasant, deplored dream—that this being of all beings should possess the power to laugh—surely this is a mystery, and a great one; a mystery—but a beauty as well as a mystery. Here, too, we are compelled to say, is one of God's beautiful compensations; He has set one thing over against another, and made everything beautiful in His time; and this compensation, as we have said, goes farther; He has not only set rejoicing against sorrow—making our smiles instructors as well as our tears—but He has dispensed this dowry of enjoyment in proportion to the dowry of pain. We sigh for some tender beings—sensitive, nervous, thrilling to every sharp wind, shrinking from all unkindness. We mourn when we think of the pain they suffer; how severely fall the blows of life upon natures so sensitive as theirs!—how words which we never feel, cut and cleave to the very marrow of their nature! But we frequently overlook the compensation: as their sufferings, so their joys. They lie very near to them too; the brighter things of this life come to them very readily: for God has ordained that the normal man shall thus carry an open soul—shall rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them

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that weep; he will spell out the great book of mysteries about him; and smiles or tears will make him only more perfect in love.

Is it not true? Do not laughers teach you?—From whom, then, come the most chaste snow-flakes of tenderness, of sympathy, chastity, charity? Who have loved the world most?—who proffer to you the most consolatory words?—who speak most truly and naturally of their own suffering? Is it not ever your good-tempered, merry beings? We do not mean the mere merryman of the world's stage—the clown; but the man who has learned to read the harmonies and coherencies of things amidst worlds of disorder and misdoing,—to whom beautiful forms have come amidst the fevers of pain,—to whom a thousand tricksy spirits have disported themselves. Gentle, genial, gladsome loving. We know how many persons dread the laugher—the so-called wit—the punster; but no one need dread this gentle being. Pretensive charlatans are the only beings we need dread—and these again, let us say, we need never dread; their wounds irritate, but do not hurt. The man who has entered into the meaning of laughter—who sees its wise why and wherefore—who sees that it has its sacred side—that it is the glass by which to detect folly, by magnifying it,—he cannot recklessly and lavishly launch his shafts around him. Keen when he strikes, he will not strike till

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you deserve the blow,—and it will be a blow for Humanity and Truth.

Most persons regard laughter and the perception of the ridiculous as pleasant companions with whom one may be merry round the fire on winter nights, but few are they to whom they are the best and truest teachers; few are they who regard them as the world's great reformers, and who not only learn to laugh but laugh to learn. Even Dr. Thomas Brown, usually so acute, saw nothing in laughter beyond its power to add to cheerfulness; but in truth it should be so: The man who laughs wisely can instruct us; the fountains of this man's sympathies are easily moved; his mind is not only readily awakened by the ludicrous, but the influences of kindness, and the impulses of love also readily stir his spirit. In a word, he is deeply sympathetic with all the tones and utterances of nature. And thus it is that error is best confronted by a good humoured face and smiling countenance. Angry sarcasms and biting rankling words of venom can effect but little for the world; on the contrary quiet inuendo, and cheerful laughter, have done, and will do much. We would have all, who wish to be the teachers of their fellows, to make the characters of our Uncle Toby or Sancho Panza their own; to make men laugh in love, not in terror; to fascinate their eyes to the bright ovals and orderly ways of Nature, not to the

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sharp angles and crude crotchets of conventional Man.

For, although, few men are capable of expressing the ludicrous, or uttering the sharp periods of brilliant wit, who is insensible to the ludicrous when presented? The ludicrous to the eye, or to the mind, the unwonted circumstance in strange association. How fond we all are of the anecdote bringing to light some incongruity of character; some eccentricity of habit or manner. We enjoy those biographies which abound with them. Can any reader be insensible to the following, of a most distinguished Biblical scholar, preacher, and writer; yet it contains neither wit nor fancy: its odd quaintness attracts us; we are surprised by an apparently most incongruous association of idea, and this, in all instances, kindles to mirth.

The Rev. Dr. Brown, of Haddington, the well known author of the "Self-Interpreting Bible," was a man of singular bashfulness. In token of the truth of this statement, I need only state that his courtship lasted seven years. Six years and a half passed away, and Mr. B—— had got no further forward than he had been the first six days. This state of things became intolerable; a step in advance must be made, and Dr. Brown summoned all his courage for the deed.

"Janet," said he, as they sat one night in solemn silence, "we've been acquainted now for six

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years an' mair, and I've ne'er gotten a kiss yet;—d'ye think I might take one, ma bonnie girl?"

"Just as you like, John; only be becoming and proper wi' it."

"Surely, Janet; we'll ask a blessing."

The blessing was asked—the kiss was taken, and the worthy man, perfectly overpowered with the blissful sensation, most rapturously exclaimed, "O woman! but it is *gude*—we'll *return thanks*."

Six months made the pious couple man and wife, and, added his descendant, who humorously told the tale, "a happier couple never spent a long and useful life together."

The source of the ludicrous, then, is ever incongruity; the most unexpected combination of opposites of things and ideas, utterly unlike in themselves. This is always the cause of laughter.

There is a story told of three chimney sweepers, who met three Chinese, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Both were astonished; the black figures with the black bags and the white teeth only visible, upset the gravity of the Chinese: and the curious figures with long tails, small caps upon the head, dark brown or olive skin, curious dress, these surprised the chimney sweep: the chimney sweep laughed at the Chinese, and the Chinese at the chimney sweep, until, saith the story, "both parties rolled upon the pavement laughing at each other." Sayings which would make no impression upon us at

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other times, compel us to laughter if they are uttered in incongruous places, or uttered to singularly inapplicable people. Whether the English House of Commons be a grave place or not, no doubt the speaker is a grave person, and fills a very grave office. There once happened to be a dead silence in the house, when its members were all present; this was broken by a startling hiccough in the gallery, and the voice of a drunken reporter putting the stunning interrogation, "Mr. Speaker, will you favour us with a song?"

A friend once sent to Sidney Smith a note, requesting him to sit for his portrait to Landseer, the great dog painter. Sydney wrote back,

"Is thy servant a *dog* that he should do this thing?"

Is it not the incongruity that startles us here?

An exchange paper, in speaking of the growing importance of Memphis, Tennessee, says:

"The population amounts to six thousand persons, and sixty-five thousand bales of cotton."

This is very like a learned professor's description of Albany:

"It contains six thousand houses, and twenty-five thousand inhabitants, all standing with their gable ends to the street."

Incongruity of dress may make us smile. Thus it is that we laugh at *mere* absurdity, which is but another name for incongruity. Much that compels our loudest and most unrestrained merriment, fre-

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quently has no other claim than that we behold the most perfect intermingling and marriage of opposites. Frequently words come dancing together like people of all sizes, and shapes, and dresses, at a carnival. There is no merit in such ludicrous representations; it is a form of the ludicrous even lower than the burlesque. The American newspapers, more than any productions in the world, abound with this kind of absurdity, which appears to consist only in taking words, without any selection, from the dictionary, and tumbling them pell mell over the paper. Here is an instance, in a touch of mock sublimity from the "New Orleans Sun:"—

"I rise, Mr. President, to argue the case of the rich man and the poor man, and I believe, that before I shall have concluded, you will allow that it admits of no argument. The rich man, Mr. President, declines his emaciated form on a mahogany sofa, cut down, hewed out, carved, and manufactured from the tall cedars of Lebanon, which grew upon the lofty and cloud-clapt summit of the ever-memorable mountain of Jehosophat. Then, Mr. President, he lifts to his cadaverous lip, the golden china cup—manufactured, as is well known, Mr. President, in Chili, Peru, and other unknown and uninhabited parts of the universe. While on the other hand, Mr. President, the poor man declines his expectation in a cottage, from

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which he retires to the shade of some umbrageous stream—there to contemplate the incomprehensibility of the vast constellation and other fixed and immoveable satellites that devolve around the celestial axletree of this teroquous firmament on high. Then, Mr. President, after calling around him his wife, and the rest of his little children, he teaches them to perspire to scenes of immortality beyond the grave."

And it is not wit, but the utterly absurd combination of ideas that compels us to laugh at the story of the facetious old lady, who, describing the rambling sermons of her minister, said:

"If his text had the small pox, his sermon would never catch it."

Altogether without arrangement, connection, or method.

We laugh at nonsense; we are told it is very wrong: well, but we cannot help it. There are nonsense verses, so called, where truisms are distended to absurdities. The following lines are a part of a very touching poem sent to the editor of the "Christian Citizen," whereupon he remarks, "The sympathy of friends in the hour of trial is a blessing of which we would not lightly speak, but when that sympathy takes the form of poetry, and the wounded spirit is treated *hydropathically*, and absolutely *drenched* with the *waters* of Helicon—why we must laugh. Here is something now

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which would have made Job himself forget his afflictions:—

"But sickness and afflictions is trials sent
By the will of a wise creation,
And always ought to be underwent
With fortytude and resignation.
Then mourn not for yer pardner's death,
But to submit endevver;
For sposen she hadent a died so soon,
She couldent a lived for ever."

Laughter is legitimate enough here, but the most of people, when they see these things, do not believe that there are left persons who can thus exhibit the gift of their genius. Yes, once upon a time, lines were addressed to us, the writer of this book, mostly made up of such triplets as

"The night was dark, the moon was hid,
No stars were seen, but clouds instid,
As o'er the roaring waves we rid
Across the mighty main."

"I believe they were talking about me, for they laughed most consumedly," said Scrub; and when absurdity heaps and jumbles things together that should ever be kept separate, tossing all the rules of speech about in wonderful malpropriety; jolting image against image, till maids from the scullery and maids of honour, courtiers and chimney sweeps, and all the odds and ends of things appear to swim

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in one great ocean of folly: what can we do but laugh? But all this is higher in its conception than the reach of mere absurdity. The following are nonsense verses:—

Somebody in the London Forget-Me-Not, thus poetizes:—

"Oh, were I a swan on the blue bosomed lake,
Or a squirrel in greenwood, sweet pastime to take;
From the durance of walls I would set myself free,
And——bound from this lattice to thee."

To which a Wisconsin editor thus responds:

"Though you're neither a *swan* on the blue bosomed lake,
Nor a squirrel in greenwood, sweet pastime to take;
The reflection may surely some pleasure produce,
That at least—you're a very respectable *goose*."

More than two-thirds of all the fun that shakes our spirits, crimsons our face, and sets our table in a roar, results from the perception of some absurdity, and it very frequently comes about, that the absurdity we behold in some one particular instance suggests to us as almost unconsciously another absurdity, making the first suggestion to wear a moral and didactic appearance.

Cist, of the "Cincinnati Enquirer," tells a capital story about a constable in Pennsylvania. He had served a legal proscript, of some sort, on a particular friend of his, who, greatly drunk at the time, rebelled against the law and its myrmidon,

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seizing the officer and shaking him almost to pieces. The parties meeting a few days after, Jim, the offender, was profuse in his apologies. "You know, Jake," said he, "I would not have served you so if I had been sober; it was the whisky did it all.' The official at last mollified and relented under Jim's expostulations. "As to the shaking," said he, "I don't bear you any malice, or valley it a cent on my own account; but, as an officer, Jim, recollect whoever shakes me, *shakes the commonwealth.*"

And other instances of the pride of a little brief authority become in like manner absurd.

"Mamma," said Miss Juliana Selina Carolina Languish, "who are those Middletons—are they *anybody?*"

"Why, my dear, young Middleton joined in the hunt last week, and was introduced at the last ball, and he keeps a tiger; so you know he must be somebody."

"Yes, mamma; but I can't help thinking that they are only *retired.* Very good sort of people, no doubt, and all that sort of thing; but there is something about them that makes me think that they are *nobody*, after all."

"My dear, they must be *somebody.*"

"No, mamma, they want to pass for *somebody;* but as everybody knows, there is always a something which tells you directly whether anybody is

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anybody, and it is not a bit of use for anybody who is *nobody* to pretend to be *somebody*."

We may note a few of the *variations of the ludicrous*, especially those of the lower order of the laughable. The simplest forms of incongruity are in *exaggeration* and *caricature*; these are pictorial witticisms which appeal to the mind through the eye. We all remember the nose of Slawkenbergius, but what is even that nose to the nose of Bardolph? But there is more humour in the single line with which Sterne introduces Slawkenbergius to us, than in the tale itself. "Learned men, brother Toby, don't write dialogues upon long noses for nothing." The witty and the humoursome must always be distinguished from the merely droll and odd. We laugh at drollery in dress, at drollery in manners. The lowest order of the ludicrous is representative, but it is obvious that every day of our life we may find topics to engage our risibility. Imagine a dispassionate foreigner, walking through our city streets; the objects that would strike him as exaggerations are endless, even as we have been similarly struck when in foreign countries. Thus if our mental eyes were open, all society would present to us its various distortions. Undoubtedly the disposition to laugh at the foibles of the world, is far more healthy than to sneer at them: one or the other we must frequently do. All societies, and institutions, and states, have

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more or less of symbol worship,—nothing is more laughable than this, when you detect nothing behind the symbol. Figure a dwarf throwing his arms of protection round Gog or Magog; figure an elephant dancing a minuet; or a monkey acting Hamlet, or dying in love with Juliet. This spirit of exaggeration is the source of the Fabulist's power, the mighty spirit of Prosopopœa which makes dead, mute, and material things to give forth lessons of instruction; this, too, is the foundation of the burlesque. Sometimes things noble in themselves, frequently great and true, have been the subjects of its mockery,—in such instances we need not say the wit fails. But if you hear tones elevated to extraordinary magniloquence—(and of this all our greatest poets have been not infrequently guilty); if the loss of a lover, or a slipper, or a fortune, be celebrated in the same verse as Paradise Lost; or if the battles of two rival flunkies be related in the same measure as Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered; in instances like these we recognize the legitimate burlesque. Thus, Fielding in Tom Thumb ridicules the stately triviality of Dryden—

> "So when two dogs are fighting in the streets,
> With a third dog one of the two dogs meets;
> With angry tooth he bites him to the bone,
> And *this dog* smarts for what that dog had done."

Leigh Hunt in his Essay on Wit and Humour,

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quotes a similar mock heroic, from Christopher Stuart—

"Thus when a barber and a collier fight,
The barber beats the luckless collier white.
In comes the brick dustman with rouge bespread,
And beats the barber and the collier red;
The rallying collier whirls his empty sack,
And beats the brick dustman and barber black;
Black, white, and red, in various clouds are tost,
And in the dust they raise, the combatants are lost."

Let us quote a few more of these illustrations, with which the literature of England, a century since, teemed. Pope uttered them most opulently.

"Here thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes—*tea*."

Again, in Branston's "Man of Taste:

"My hair I'd powder in a woman's way,
And dress, and talk of dressing more than they;
I'll please the maids of honour if I can;
Without black velvet breeches—what is Man?"

Thus, for a fine illustration, Johnson's parodies of the Ancient Ballads are all admirable.

"Hermit hoar, in solemn cell,
Wearing out life's evening grey,
Strike thy bosom, sage, and tell,
What is bliss—and which the way?

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Thus I spoke, and speaking sigh'd,
Scarce repressed the starting tear,
When the hoary sage replied,
'Come, my lad, and drink some beer.'"

It might be proper here to notice a few of the elements of laughter, or rather those mental constituents, which combine to produce what we call wit or humour: but principally the wit, or humourist, needs secretiveness. Every shaft of wit, every peal of humour, is caused more or less by a reservation, upon which the author was hugging himself, or keeping his readers or hearers in mystery as to what he was about. The following scene from the "Comedy of Errors" is excellent in this. Adriano is led on to criminate herself as she piles up her accusations against her husband; and in the last line the laugh is turned against her by the reply of the Abbess.

Enter the Abbess.

ABB. Be quiet, people: wherefore throng you hither?

ADRIANO. To fetch my poor distracted husband hence:

Let us come in, that we may bind him fast,
And bear him home for his recovery.

ANGELO. I knew he was not in his perfect wits.

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MERCHANT. I am sorry now that I did draw on him.

ABB. How long hath this possession held the man?

ADR. This week he hath been heavy, sour, sad,
And much, much different from the man he was;
But, till this afternoon, his passion
Ne'er brake into extremity of rage.

ABB. Hath he not lost much wealth by wreck at sea?
Buried some dear friend? Hath not else his eye
Stray'd his affection in unlawful love?
A sin prevailing much in youthful men,
Who give their eyes the liberty of gazing.
Which of these sorrows is he subject to?

ADR. To none of these, except it be the last;
Namely, some love that drew him oft from home.

ABB. You should for that have reprehended him.

ADR. Why, so I did.

ABB. Ay, but not rough enough.

ADR. As roughly as my modesty would let me.

ABB. Haply in private.

ADR. And in assemblies too.

ABB. Ay, but not enough.

ADR. It was the copy of our conference:
In bed, he slept not for my urging it;
At board, he fed not for my urging it;
Alone, it was the subject of my theme;

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In company, I often glanced at it;
Still did I tell him it was vile and bad.

ABB. *And thereof came it that the man was mad!"*

The ludicrous to which we first referred is mostly *antithetical* and *verbal;* and to this order of the ridiculous *punning* must be assigned—to quite an inferior order of humour. Many men of rich genius, however, have excelled in these clenches of words; and many men of great imagination and power of conception have been quite incapable of the pun. Thomas Hood was the prince of all punsters, in verse or prose—in picture sketching or conversation. He could scarcely use his pen, or open his lips, without uttering a double meaning, or listen to a sentence without making one; and a better illustration cannot be furnished, in our times, of the close neighbourhood of humour and pathos, of exquisite sensibility to the softness of the rose and the pungency of the nettle: at the same time one laments that a mind constituted like his, so clearly to perceive resemblances and differences should have wasted its oil of life in mere verbal pantomimes. Before we close this volume, we shall turn back to Hood again, to notice some of those truths which he told with such delightful humour. Many who enjoy the fun and merriment of these exaggerations to which we have now referred,—

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the grotesque allusion, the burlesque, and the *double entendre*, do not care for the higher meanings of mirth, and are even too mentally lazy to decipher many of the hieroglyphs in which humour writes her lessons to their eyes.

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CHAPTER III.

WIT AND HUMOUR.

But what are those two mirth-provoking spirits *Wit* and *Humour*? How many efforts have been made to define them, and to limit their functions? We may notice some of the manifold opinions.—Thus, Locke has described wit "as lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy." The definition of Locke is sufficient for poetry, but it does not define wit or witticism; but the meaning attached to the term in Locke's day, appears to have differed greatly from ours, and included general talent and accomplishment. Addison heightened the properties mentioned by Locke, and added to them Delight, Surprise, and Dissimilitude, as completing ingredients. "Every resemblance in the ideas," he observes, is not that

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which we call *wit*, except it be such a one as gives delight and surprise to the reader, particularly the last; and it is necessary that the ideas should not lie too near one another, in the nature of things, for, where the likeness is obvious, it creates no surprise." And upon this hint all succeeding writers upon this subject have spoken. The two ablest and most instructive, as well as entertaining essays in our language, on the metaphysical characteristics of wit, are by William Hazlitt* and Leigh Hunt.† From them we learn that "Wit is the clash and reconcilement of incongruities," "that two ideas are as necessary to wit, as couples are to marriages;" hence "keeping in comic character is consistency in absurdity. Wit is the eloquence of indifference hovering around the borders of light, and trifling, whether in matters of pleasure or pain; for, as soon as it describes the serious seriously, it ceases to be wit, and passes into a different form.

Again, wit has been described as the marriage of ideas lying wide apart by a sudden jerk of the understanding. In the delineation of the ludicrous it is not difficult to perceive the wide difference between wit and humour. Wit is much less amiable than humour; the function of the one seems to be to sneer and to curse; of the other to smile

* Lectures on the English Comic Writers. † Wit and Humour.

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and instruct. The essence of wit is cleverness, sharpness, hawk-eyed intellectual cunning; the essence of humour is wisdom gleaned from everything, and intensified by sympathy with the universal-All. Humour lies nearest to seriousness,—wit nearest to melancholy. The soul of humour is faith; the soul of wit is doubt, mistrust, scepticism. There is no ease in wit; but you may know humour by its invariable and proverbial ease. Wit isolates itself, retires into the corner, watches and gibbers; humour fraternises, comes into the company and sings. Humour is usually cheerful: wit is as usually morose. Wit is objective; it says "Give me something to hate and to attack!"—humour is subjective; it says "Give me something to love, to paint, to describe, to defend!" And hence, then, of the wit, the satirist,—we feel rather the terror of his genius; the humourist, we feel the usefulness of his aim.

Perhaps it may further be said that wit is Celtic, and humour Teutonic; of course, exceptions may be instanced; but the mind of France and Ireland, and of England and Germany, confirm the generalization. We might say something upon the resemblances of Irish and French wit. We have never seen the resemblance pointed out, but who does not immediately detect the resemblance? The Celtic people are the most purely witty race in the world—they turn ideas inside out. Their

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wit is not spiritual, but it is ethereal: it does not soar, it is too material for that—but for that very reason it is better understood. French and Irish wit—French and Irish poetry—French and Irish oratory much resemble each other—they all display the brilliancy of the rocket. The humblest *bourgeiose* you meet in the Rue St. Honore is a wit. You cannot say the same for the humblest Irishman, yet the characteristic holds in the same degree. The gallantry of both people is very noticeable too. The ready wit of a true-born Irishman, however humble, is exceeded only by his gallantry.

"A few days since," says an exchange paper, "we observed a case in point. A sudden gust of wind took a parasol from the hand of its owner, and before one had a chance to recollect whether it would be his etiquette to catch the parasol of a lady to whom he had never been introduced, a lively Emeralder dropped his hod of bricks, caught the parachute in the midst of its Ellsler gyrations, and presented it to the loser, with a low bow, which reminded us of poor Power. 'Faith, madam,' said he as he did so, 'if you were as strong as you are handsome, it wouldn't have got away from you.' 'Which shall I thank you for first, the service or the compliment?' asked the lady smilingly. 'Troth, madam,' said Pat, again touching the place where once stood the brim of what

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was a beaver, 'that look of your beautiful eye thanked me for both.'"*

Excepting Cervantes (an Iberian) and Le Sage, almost all the real humourists in the world were of the great German Family. And no literature boasts of such abounding illustrations of every kind of humour, from the simplest quaintness to the highest dramatic delineation, as the English. Voltaire, writing and speaking in this respect, embodied the characteristics of the Celtic Mind, when he described Frenchmen as "hyenas in breeches." He said a thing we would not have dared to quote had it not been uttered by a Frenchman. Almost every witticism is a sneer, when, for instance, he tells us that Penn's treaty with the Indians was the only one unratified by an oath, and the only one that was ever kept." His description of a battle-field—"a hundred thousand mad animals, with hats on, assembled to blow one another's brains out." Voltaire, himself, was once discomfited by Dr. Young, with a smart hit of true Celtic sharpness;—Voltaire ran down, in the presence of the doctor, Milton's talents. He particularly condemned in the "Paradise Lost," Death, Sin, and Satan as personified in that poem. He railed at the invention as extravagant, and made it the principal subject of his sarcasms. Young sat si-

* Liverpool Mercury.

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lently listening, but, indignant at the irreverence and the levity of the Frenchman, he lifted his finger, and pointing it at him, said,

> "Thou art so witty, wicked, and so thin,
> Thou art at once the Devil, Death, and Sin."

We have said that wit is aggressive, while humour is defensive. The quaint old Thomas Fuller said that the "Negro was the image of God carved in ebony;" to which Johnson added, that "the slave holder was the image of the Devil carved in ivory;" the first of these sentences is an instance of humour, the second is an instance of wit. Something like Johnson's sharp sentence are these from America, perhaps, as true, yet not so good.

Parker Pillsbury, speaking upon one occasion of the so-called "cottonocracy" of Boston, said that they would "dam up the river of life, that they might build cotton-mills in the city of the New Jerusalem."

And the American definition of mustachios is like unto it.

"The upper lip going in mourning for the loss of brains."

Both of these are instances of wit.

Sheridan's description of Mr. Addington's administration as the fag end of Mr. Pitt's, who had remained so long on the bench, that like Nicias in

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the fable "he left the sitting part of the man behind him," is an instance of wit. The reply of Porson who, to the remark, that certain modern poets would be read and admired, when Homer and Virgil were forgotten, made answer—and not till then; might be cited as an instance of sarcasm, but the humour overflows the bitterness. When Boswell wished to relinquish his lodgings, and no inducement would avail with the landlord to consent to his departure, as they had been taken for a term of years; Johnson suggested that he should "say he wished to make some experiment in natural philosophy, and burn a large quantity of assafœtida in the house." This is an instance of humour. No doubt, we feel better what humour is than we can describe it; though even in a mere etymological sense, the word is not incomplete or inexpressive? Does it not imply the incessant play of lively and natural feeling, which finds natural resemblances everywhere; which continues for the longest period of time unruffled, and undisturbed; which extends its sympathies to all being, and finds an answering lesson of instruction everywhere and in everything; is it not that homeliness of heart, which never so much sighs for companionship because always in company; which is too great for contempt and for sneering, and too humble for ostentation or pride; which enters by intuition into the feelings of many minds, and by

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its own intensity understands theirs; is it not large liberality of soul which beareth all things, believeth all things, as far removed from the frown of bigotry, as from the callowness of indifference? and therefore it may again be repeated, that there is no foe more terrible than good humour. What can you do with a healthy hearted, healthy headed being, moving on his way in down-right earnest when you let him alone; but who, if you venture a moment to interfere with, you find, has not only the spirit of truth, but the fearful spirit of humour too; who will in a moment impale you on a sharp and unexpected retort, hang up your argument quivering on the point of some joke, or even hold up your dear error, as a very scarecrow for even yourself to laugh at. Humour is Nature oozing out of a man—Independence from restraint—a sense of freedom; a sense of sympathy and fellowship. We can refer to a passage in Dr. Chalmers' Posthumous Discourses, which conveys much that we would imply.

"There is," says he, "a set of people whom I cannot bear—the pinks of fashionable propriety—whose every word is precise, and whose every movement is unexceptionable; but who, though versed in all the categories of polite behaviour, have not a particle of soul or of cordiality about them. We allow that their manners may be abundantly correct. There may be elegance in

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every gesture, and gracefulness in every position; not a smile out of place, and not a step that would bear the measurement of the severest scrutiny. This is all very fine; but what I want is the heart and gaiety of social intercourse—the frankness that spreads ease and animation around it—the eye that speaks affability to all, that chases timidity from every bosom, and tells every man in the company to be confident and happy. This is what I conceive to be the virtue of the text, and not the sickening formality of those who walk by rule, and would reduce the whole human life to a wire-bound system of misery and constraint."

And this natural ease, this grace and elegance of manner translated into conversation, or discourse, into the poem or the pulpit, when it may take place in a most happily instructive temper. This unreserved openness of soul; this beautiful entireness and simplicity of tongue, pen, or life, is humour.

This is the spirit of old English literature.—Humour is interlaced in the style of all our old English writers, like threads of gold. By it, in a sentence they described—in a sentence they confuted: quaint and axiomatic, they showed at once the richness of their minds, the depths of their experience, and the condensed grandeur of their style. To go up to times beyond our essayists—are our readers acquainted with a book too seldom read

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or referred to—the Microcosmography of good old Bishop Earle? Although very small, "'tis full as an egg"—full of that downright thinking, and talking, which humour likes:—"A she-hypocrite" is "one that thinks she performs all her duties to God in hearing, and shows the fruits of it in talking."—"An idle gallant" is "one that was born and shaped for his clothes; and if Adam had not fallen, had lived to no purpose." And to the life is the portrait of the Formalist sketched. "The chief burden of whose brain is the carriage of his body, and the setting of his face in a good frame, which he performs the better, because he is not disjointed with other meditations. * * He apprehends a jest by seeing men smile, and laughs orderly himself when it comes to his turn." The humourist convinces you how much he loves his own meditations. The wit must be ever caustic; he has but few gentle paintings or emotions; but the humourist overflows with these. How sweet is that closing touch of Earle's picture of the good old man:—"He goes away at last—too soon whensoever, with all men's sorrow but his own; and his memory is fresh when it is twice as old." And in the same spirit is the picture of a child:—"A man in a small letter, yet the best copy of Adam before he tasted of Eve or the apple. Nature and his parents alike dandle him, and 'tice him on with a bait of sugar to a draught of wormwood. We

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laugh at his foolish parts, but his game is our earnest; and his drums, rattles, and hobby-horses, but the emblem and mocking of men's business.—The elder he grows, he is a stair lower from God, and, like his first father, much worse in his breeches."* Thus humour dilates over a subject with alternate tears and smiles; its eye is not wanting in a certain roguish twinkle—nay, it sometimes winks at an absurdity, but laughs on. "I understand you," it says, as if it put the sentence in words; but everywhere its geniality and healthfulness make the delightful instructor and companion.

Those dear old English Writers, Preachers, Essayists, Historians—Jeremy Collier, Owen Feltham, South, Cowley, Fuller—thus they spoke.—How pleasant it would be to sit down and note all the racy passages of these ancient men! True to the spirit of humour, they did not aim so much, in their writings, to express the opinions of other men as their own; they did not, in every page, hunt like the spaniel for praise, and, therefore, with a graceful bluntness, if the phrase is not too paradoxical, they uttered their saying and went their way. Fuller is one of the most quaint and graphic writers of the Old England of that day.—His sentences lie short and sharp over his passages. Yet there is no ill feeling, there "his doctrine

* Bishop Earle's Microcosmography, 1628.

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always distils as the dew." He is full of anecdote, —garrulous, the old man will talk on, and as he sits and chats, he holds you with a smile, and now with some unexpected pleasantry—and now by some bolder witticism, honest cheerfulness characterizes all he has to say to us. There were, questionless, dunces in England in that day; but it is certain that the literature of the time floats to us upon a perfect sea of humour. We have quoted a sentence from him already, and space forbids to cite many of the grains of his gold dust. It was he who first defined "policy to consist in serving God in such a manner as not to offend the devil. It was he who said:—

"Let him who expects one class in society to prosper to the highest degree while others are in distress, try whether one side of his face can smile while the other is pinched."

A magician is Wit. Poetry is a magician, too; but the one builds and creates—the other does not so much invent as reconstruct, in the true spirit of Flibbertigibbet; a mischievous fairy is wit. Poetry hangs domes of crystal in the air, and spars and arches of alabaster for diademed princes and coronetted queens to walk over; plants gardens of Eastern magnificence, and makes the universe a temple and a song. Wit disarranges all this, and introduces you to a king in his night-cap, taking his treacle possett; sends you into the

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chamber of a beau, whose killing graces had but this evening won tender looks from Chloes, and Delias, and Belindas innumerable, and shows you his teeth, his wig, his false hair, his false eye, his stays; everything that will not bear looking at *en dishabille* is fair game for Wit. Wit would take down a palace-dome to build a kennel for the buck-hounds—would take a cobbler from his stall, and set him on a throne; fine food for laughter there,

"A court of cobblers, and a mob of kings."

Many a time has Wit sent a fat alderman to pass through a turn-stile; has compelled a hungry Jew to dine from pork, to the scandal of his conscience; has surprised sentimental ladies perpetrating ruinous work beneath the walls of old abbeys; has sent some raw right honourable youth of twenty-one or twenty-two to legislate for his country; has in a most jocose mood persuaded him to crucify himself for ever in a speech, to be quoted when he shall be fifty years of age. Wit stands by the shoulders of public functionaries, when they write letters to their inferiors in station—bids them subscribe themselves obedient, humble servants.—There never was such a mischief-making elf as Wit. With wonderful avidity it seizes upon the paradoxes of humanity; into every avenue of life it darts its porcupine quills; it interprets what is little or ridiculous by light derived from its oppo-

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site idea; it deals with the nicest refinements of the ludicrous; and also with what Sterling calls, in his strong, graphic way, "the trivial and the bombastic—the drivelling, squinting, sprawling clowneries of Nature, with her worn-out stage properties, and Rag-fair emblazonments." Interpreting wit thus, in its simplest meaning, as the perception of the ludicrous—the detection of contradictions, we find how vast is the field, and how numerous are the objects of its observation! In a word, it tolerates no sham, no disarray, no uncouth proportions; wherever these are, there is cause for dread. Wit lives ever close in such neighbourhoods. Wherever there is a nervous terror, a dread, a fidgetiness, an anxiety to please and conciliate everybody, every institution, everything, there is precisely that against which Wit lifts its terrible finger, and bursts forth in its loud merriment.

Humour is the Great Teacher: When a man sits down cheerfully to impart himself to the mind of his readers, when he determines to invest the didactic in a silvery haze of pleasantry, how his lessons glide into the spirit! Those rough angles, so harsh in the discourse of some, even of the wisest men, are explained away; there is a paternal kindness about the instruction. However old the lesson may be, it seems to come to us fresh and new; for cheerfulness is ever vernal—its face

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is ever renewed with smiles—it sheds an influence over the spirit, like a chaste May-day morning. A sly allusion peeps out from a description of the oldest and most antique thing. We feel that the writer was looking at us while he said that; that he had an eye upon modern things, and intended, from the oldest text, to preach to us a new sermon. We have lying before us a description of the first wedding, and we think we discern in it Nicholas Hawthorn's method of discourse, that sweet American humourist, whose words so readily move us to mirth or to tears. In America are more frequently delivered discourses upon the propriety of early marriages. Such lessons are for infant states. Alas! in ancient civilizations, like ours, we should rather call the humourist to teach us to put a rein upon the impulses of Nature, and make us the disciples of a Malthusian Utilitarianism.

"We like short courtships, and in his, Adam acted sensibly—he fell asleep a bachelor, and awoke to find himself a married man. He appears to have popped the question almost immediately after meeting Mademoiselle Eve, and she, without any flirtation or shyness, gave him a kiss and herself. Of that first kiss in this world we have had, however, our own thoughts; and sometimes, in a poetical mood, have wished we were the man 'wot did it.' But the deed is done—the chance was Adam's and he improved it.

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"We like the notion of getting married in a garden. It is in good taste. We like a private wedding. Adam's was private. No envious beaux were there; no croaking old maids; no chattering aunts, or grumbling grandmothers. The birds of heaven were the minstrels; and the glad sky flung its light upon the scene.

"One thing about the first wedding brings queer ideas to us, in spite of its Scriptural truth. Adam and his wife were rather young to be married (some two or three days old, according to the sagest speculations of theologians,) mere babies—larger but not older—without experience, without a house, without a pot or kettle, with nothing but love and Eden."

We have already said a thousand times, and we shall say a thousand times again, let no man imagine he has a mission to teach his fellows from the platform, or even from the pulpit, unless he have that sunshiny qualification of the soul, called humour. It is as indispensable to give effect to the gravest, as well as to the gayest paintings. The possession of it will be the measure of the power to enter the minds of other men; to please the humblest, to charm and overawe the highest. It is when this quality is not possessed that preachers merit the satiric stroke of Sidney Smith, who, speaking of the prosy nature of certain sermons, said,

"They are written as if sin was then taken out

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of man like Eve out of Adam, by putting him to sleep."

It is this genius of gay and instructive humour in which Eliza Cook sings, in which most of her melodies are inspired, and which leads her to say

"Out upon the calf, I say,
Who turns his grumbling head away,
And quarrels with his feed of hay
Because it is not clover.
Give to me the happy mind
That will ever seek and find,
Something good and something kind,
All the wide world over.

Give me the heart that spreads its wings,
Like the free bird that soars and sings,
And sees the bright side of every thing,
From Bherings straits to Dover.
It is a bank that never breaks,
It is a store thief never takes,
It is a rock that never shakes,
All the wide world over.

We may be poor, but then, I guess,
Our trouble with our pomp is less;
And they who wear a russet dress,
May never fear the tumbling.
And though champaigne froth never hums
Between our fingers and our thumbs,
Red apoplexy seldom comes
To dine with plain stone dumpling.

Then, out upon the calf, I say,
Who turns his grumbling head away,

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And quarrels with his feed of hay,
Because it is not clover.
Give to me the happy mind,
That will for ever seek and find,
Something good and something kind,
All the wide world over."

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CHAPTER IV.

THE DIVINITY OF RIDICULE.

THERE has been a very interesting and ancient discussion, "*Whether Ridicule is the friend or foe of Truth?*" In harmony with our previous observations, our readers will not be surprised at the affirmation, that, as the sense of the ridiculous results from the perception of the inharmonious and disproportionate; so truth, which is but another name for moral harmonies and properties, can never be injured by ridicule. Truth may be hated, but can never be ridiculed. In order that the sarcasm and the sneer, the banter or the burlesque, may have any effect, Truth must be invested in robes which are not hers: to laugh at Religion she must be represented as Superstition, or Fanaticism; to laugh at Liberty she must be represented as Anarchy, and Confusion. Truth is so essentially lovely, that we can no more laugh at her than we can laugh at a beautiful flower, or ridicule a beautiful woman,

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or sneer at the loveliness of a bright May-morning. Truth, withal, has so much of holy sternness combined with sweetness, that when she is represented to the eye in her own character, she awes the lookers on, and compels admiration from even uncongenial hearts.

Lord Shaftesbury, in his essay "On the Freedom of Wit and Humour," comments in a most interesting manner on the saying of an ancient sage:

"That humour was the only test of gravity, and gravity of humour; for a subject which would not bear raillery was suspicious; and a fact which would not bear a serious examination was certainly false wit."

There was one famous occasion in the History of Ancient Athens, when truth and ridicule came into contact with each other, and truth achieved a signal victory. The representatives in the dispute were Aristophanes, the Comedian, and Socrates, the moralist. Our readers have not now to be acquainted that Socrates sought, by his teaching, to lift the Athenians from their superstitions: by the wonderful rapidity and justness of his reasonings, he confounded the sophists, and priests, and orators of his day; but while he was away from his city, with extraordinary bravery fighting the battles of his country, at Delium, where he saved the life of the great historian, Xenophon, and performed such prodigies of valour and heroism, that

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even the scurrilous Lucian places him above the greatest heroes of antiquity. While thus absent from his city, a party had been formed against him, and Aristophanes hired, as seems likely, by this party, to produce upon the stage a comedy, ridiculing Socrates. This comedy was, "The Clouds:" in it Socrates was represented hanging up in a basket in the air, uttering numberless chimerical absurdities, and blaspheming, as it was then reputed, his country's gods. Socrates never frequented the theatre, except when the tragedies of Euripides were performed; in the composition of which it is reported he had no inconsiderable share. But hearing much of the piece—"The Clouds"—he determined to see it when produced, the first time. He went to the theatre; he sat unmoved during the gross abuse offered to his character; he did not show the least resentment or anger: but some strangers knowing that the original of the scenic picture was present, and, desiring to see him, he, with great good nature, stood up in the middle of the performance, and continued standing the rest of the time: that rising was fatal to the piece—the spectacle of that well-known face, so serene beneath the confidence of innocence and personal merit, was the best contradiction to the malicious portrait of the venal poet. The edge of the ridicule being misapplied, turned from the moralist to the comedian; and when "The Clouds"

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was a second time produced upon the stage, it was rejected with contempt. Had "The Clouds" been successful in its exhibition, the enemies of the moralist would have immediately brought him to trial: but four-and-twenty years elapsed between the performance of the comedy and his condemnation.* It is very remarkable, therefore, that Bishop Warburton, in his "Divine Legation of Moses," should cite this as an instance of the pernicious effects of ridicule. Here are his words:—

"We have upon record the most illustrious example of this contention that ever was—viz., between Truth and Ridicule. The dispute I mean was between Socrates and Aristophanes. Here truth had all the advantage of place, of weapons, and of judges: the first employed his whole life in the cause of virtue; the other only a few comic scenes against it. But, Heavens! against what virtue? Against the purest and lightest portion of it that ever enlightened the Gentile world. For all this the comic poet triumphed, and with the coarsest kind of buffoonery,—little fitted, one would think, to take so polite a people—had the art to tarnish all this virtue; and, what was more, to make the owner resemble his direct opposite—that character he most hated—that very character he had employed all his wit to detect, lay open, and confound; in one word,—the sophist."

* See Cooper's Life of Socrates, 1729.

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The consequence was, as we have stated above, that the jester received a castigation for his pains. Many persons, however, still connect the performance of "The Clouds" with the condemnation of Socrates. But that event brought forth more prominently into triumph those virtues, and that intelligence which it was the object of Aristophanes to destroy. The whole of the remarks of Warburton only prove that truth may be so *disguised*, as to be injured by ridicule; but this, so far from proving that truth shrinks from the keen flashes of humour and wit, does but confirm its irresistible dignity and superiority;—and hence, we see the justice of the propositions of Lord Shaftesbury, that nothing is ridiculous except what is deformed. Nor is any thing proof against raillery, except what is handsome and just. The most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth,—for all beauty is truth. True features make the beauty of the face, and true propositions the beauty of architecture—as true measures that of harmony and music. How, therefore, can one possibly make a jest of honesty? One may defy the world to turn real bravery or generosity into ridicule. A glutton, or mere sensualist, is as ridiculous as the other two characters. Nor can an unaffected temperance be made the subject of contempt to any besides the grossest and the most contemptible of mankind. Now, these three in-

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gredients make up a virtuous character—the opposite then must be a vicious one. To laugh both ways is nonsensical; and if the ridicule lie against sottishness, avarice, and cowardice, you see the consequence. A man must be soundly ridiculous who, with all the wit imaginable, would go about to ridicule wisdom, or laugh at honesty or good manners.*

And this, then, is the great lesson taught us by reading the ludicrous side of life; that men's better perceptions teach them, that honesty, truth, and virtue, are best in the long run; that knavery does not pay—that it does not pay twenty shillings in the pound, even to the poor knave himself. The humourist laughs—yet in no spirit of bitterness—when he beholds inflated bankruptcy dashing by in coach-and-four, and fancying that dishonoured bills and sleek seal skin lies, always escape detection and reckoning.

Ben Jonson has a play called, "The Devil is an Ass." We will not too nicely criticise the intellectual character of that personage, but in the review of Life, the thing that strikes the humourist is, that all falseness is folly, that dishonestness outwits itself. "A knave," said Coleridge, "is a round-about fool; a fool in circumbendibus." The laughter of the humourist is heard over all the surges and heavings of unreality and pretence;

* Shaftesbury's Characteristics, Vol. 1. 128.

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of vanity, selfishness, hypocrisy, and scandal; of vapid respectability, fashionable false hood; of impudence, cant, and stupiditarianism. There is an admirable passage in an old number of the "Dial," that famous organ of American Transcendentalism, in which this æsthetic view, this philosophy of the comic is most admirably put. It is from the pen of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

"The pedantry of literature belongs to the same category. In both cases there is a lie, when the mind, seizing a classification to help it to a sincere knowledge of the fact, stops in the classification; or learning languages, and reading books, to the end of a better acquaintance with man, stops in the languages of books; in both the learner *seems* to be wise and *is* not.

The same falsehood, the same confusion of the sympathies, because a pretension is not made good, points the perpetual satire against poverty, since, according to Latin poetry and English doggerel,

> "'Poverty does nothing worse
> Than to make man ridiculous.'

"In this instance the halfness lies in the pretention of the parties to some consideration on account of their condition. If the man is not ashamed of his poverty, there is no joke. The poorest man, who stands on his manhood, destroys the jest.

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The poverty of the saint, of the rapt philosopher, of the naked Indian, is not comic. The lie is in the surrender of the man to his appearance; as if a man should neglect himself, and treat his shadow on the wall with marks of infinite respect. It affects us oddly, as to see things turned upside down, or to see a man in a high wind run after his hat, which is always droll. The relation of the parties is inverted,—hat being for the moment master. The multiplication of artificial wants and expenses in civilised life, and the exaggeration of all trifling forms, present innumerable occasions for this discrepancy to expose itself. Such is the story told of the painter, Astley, who, going out of Rome one day, with a party, for a ramble in the Campagna, and the weather proving hot, refused to take off his coat when his companions threw off theirs, but sweltered on; which, exciting remark, his comrades playfully forced off his coat, and behold, on the back of his vest a gay cascade was thundering down the rocks with foam and rainbow, very refreshing in so sultry a day;—a picture of his own, with which the poor painter had been fain to repair the shortcomings of his wardrobe. The same astonishment of the intellect at the disappearance of the man out of nature, through some superstition of his house or equipage, as if truth and virtue should be bowed out of creation by the clothes they wore, is the secret of all

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the fun that circulates concerning eminent fops and fashionists."

There is a point of vision, from whence we may look on many of the characters of every-day life, and smile while we look. Thus we may unravel the meaning of that dear book of kindly and most genial humour, "Knickerbocker's History of New York." Never were the follies of mankind more gently laughed at; every page presents to us a picture, or pictures of moral incongruities. We ourselves, have known Wouter Van Twiller; Wouter the Doubter, is a common character. We all know the golden days of Wouter, when a sweet and holy calm rested over the whole province. Blessed memory of the Dutchman, when there was nothing to do, and plenty of time to do it in; when the days were dozed away in the blissful regions of smoke!

What reader's heart has not beat with admiration while meditating on those slow days of the olden time? Who does not cast back an involuntary glance to the times of the Twiller? and who has not pictured him, too; the venerable man whose eyes, perched up in the top part of his body like pigeon holes, seemed ever in their glassy greyness to be courting sleep; whose body moved to and fro—large, shambling, and shuffling, like the Lord Mayor's coach on the ninth of November;

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who did not so much live as debate the point with himself whether he were alive or no, dying before he came to the solving of so profound a problem? Who, in reading, does not figure him fat and greasy; most of all like a bladder of lard with a pipe in it? Significantly, enough, we are told, that in the days of Wouter the Doubter, grass grew before the doors, and sheep, and calves grazed in the broad way. Blessed family of the Doubters! the men to whom Heaven's sweetest atmosphere was a gale of smoke; who were born amidst the becoming silence of the long pipes, and who closed their eyes amidst the whiffing of tobacco. This character once suited "a country parson much bemused by beer."* It must now be limited to the town or village beadle.

Rip Van Winkle is just such another sketch, from the same sly and quiet pen. Every body knows the story of Van Winkle and his strange ramble to the Kaatskill mountains, and his twenty years' sleep, and how he came back to his own village again, and how he expected, after that long unconscious slumber, to find everything unchanged; and how all was changed,—the village sign of George III., to George Washington;—wife, daughters, friends, all gone. While Rip slept, the World and Time, and Change had all been upon the move. We read the moral meaning in this plainly

* Pope.

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enough. Everybody loves Washington Irving. His merriment does not glare and glitter; it plays harmlessly round the foibles, rather than the sins and crimes of humanity; and the lighter follies and small infirmities of mankind furnish some of the choicest hints for the lovers of the ludicrous. In this connection we note the absurdities of great minds, and the egotism and foppishness of little ones. It is the perception of the ludicrous which presents to us the weaknesses of others; and let us hope that same perception of consistency is a safeguard to ourselves! in the absence of this perception we walk on stilts; we parade our virtues; we worship appearances; we studiously misrepresent ourselves; we visit sublime scenery, preparing our emotions beforehand, and laying in a stock of wonder and awe. All cant is but appearance of this *self-exaggerating* foible.

Instances of these ridiculous traits of humanity crowd upon us. "Dr. Parr," said a young student once to the old linguist,—"let you and I write a book!" "Very well;" said the doctor,—"put in all that I do know, and all that you don't know, and we'll make a big one!" The doctor, we know, was a smart satirist; but, as is often the case, he saw the foibles of others better than his own. He once said, in a miscellaneous company, England has produced three great classical scholars:—the first was Bentley; the second was

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Porson; and the third, Modesty forbids *me* to mention." One of the most pleasant pictures in the world is to see an egotist take down an egotist, as in the case of the strutting captain of a militia company in America, who, once in a fit of temporary condescension, invited a ragged negro to drink negus with him. "Oh, certainly," said the negro, "I'm not proud. I'd just as leives drink with a militia captain as anybody else."

Johnson possessed a wonderful power of smashing "the thin egg-shells of conceit" which partly concealed the mental impotence of some of his auditors. A gentleman once maintained in his company the future life of brutes. Johnson wished to discountenance the conversation, but the metaphysician, with lack-a-daisical pensiveness continued; "But, really, sir, when we see a very sensible dog, we don't know what to think of him."—Johnson, with his usual chuckling, when any one lay open, by extreme folly and pertinacity, to severe reprehension, replied, "True, sir, and when we see a very foolish *fellow*, we don't know what to think of him!" On another occasion, when one of his auditors shook his head gravely, and said he could not see the force of the doctor's remarks, he was instantly crushed by the gruff retort:—"It is my business, sir, to give you arguments; not to give you brains!" The masters of ridicule have an audacity and daring by which they instantly

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overpower, and frequently, without condescending to glance at argument, the attempts of feeble adversaries. When Lord Chatham, as a member of the House of Commons, had concluded a speech, determining the prosecution of the great English War, one of the members rose to put what probably was a very serious and unanswerable question,—"Where *can* we find means to carry on such a war?" he turned round a moment by the lobby of the house, and chaunted, gaily, by way of a reply,—"Gentle shepherd, tell me where?"

Very different was the answer by Burke, who had all Chatham's self-possession, but none of Chatham's tact. He made, on one occasion, an attack on the ministry, when George Onslow, who probably thought that he had some chance of distinction by grappling with Burke, in the House, when he was listened to very impatiently. Onslow was very desirous of sharing, if not his wisdom, at least his zeal, started up and said, haughtily, that he must call the honourable member to a sense of his duty, and that no man should be suffered in his presence to insult the sovereign. Burke listened, and when Onslow had disburdened himself of his loyalty, gravely addressed the Speaker.—"Sir, the honourable member has exhibited much ardour but little discrimination. He should know that, however I may reverence the king, I am not at all bound, nor at all inclined to extend that

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reverence to his ministers. I may honour his majesty, but, sir, I can see no possible reason for honouring"—and he glanced round the treasury bench—"his majesty's man-servant, and maid-servant, his ox, and his *ass!*"

In all these instances, the ludicrous puts on a most amiable visage. We laugh rather at the drollery, than either the humour or the wit: these are merry things that are said. We come in and enjoy our laugh with the rest.

Wonderful is *the detective power of ridicule and mirth.* Penetrating through the finest pretences, all the most brilliant but shallow patriotisms, exaggerated opinions, and well drest shams in top boots, are transparent to its eye; the defects of character are instantly weighed and understood; the defects of an argument, or a book, the defects of faith or of formalism: the orator strides across the rostrum and clothes himself with a kind of sanctity to the eye of wonder, but mirth detects the flimsiness, and, perhaps, without a sneer or a scorn, proclaims the rapturous harangue to be bombast and bathos. We can never have entire faith in selfishness; and although there is nothing good, or true, or noble, or holy, but it is perverted to the ends and aims of selfishness, yet humour penetrates the disguise, and detects the impostor beneath the borrowed name. To the eye of humour he stands unmasked; he is wanting in the wholeness

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of the true soul, and it is that very wholeness which so charms the human eye and heart, and the absence of which the instincts of men every where are so quick to perceive. Whipple, whose smart and eloquent papers are but little known in England, well says, "Everybody knows that fanaticism is religion caricatured, bears, indeed, about the same relation to it that a monkey bears to a man; yet with many, contempt of fanaticism is received as a sure sign of hostility to religion. Thus things go moaning up and down for their lost words, and words are perpetually engaged in dodging things, and it becomes exceedingly dangerous for a prudent man to discriminate between a truth and its distortion, between prudence and avarice, acuteness and cunning, sentiment and sentimentality, sanctity and sanctimoniousness, justice and 'Revised Statutes,' the dignity of human nature and the Hon. Mr. ———; yet it is just in this discrimination that the ludicrous side of life is revealed."

The wit of sense and observation delights to seize on the quaint image, and the far-fetched allegorical conceit, to illustrate these human infirmities and sins. Very much that is indeed most witty or humoursome, is only the setting down of some accurate observation of life. Is it not so with the celebrated lines of Pope?

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"'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

So Butler,

"Th' extremes of glory and of shame,
Like east and west become the same;
No Indian prince has to his palace,
More followers than a thief to the gallows."

And again, the same writer,

"The truest characters of ignorance
Are vanity, and pride, and arrogance;
As blind men use to bear their noses higher,
Than those that have their eyes and sight entire."

So Thomas Hood, in his Ode to Rae Wilson,

"You have been to Palestine,—alas!
Some minds improve by travel, others rather
Resemble copper wire, or brass,
Which gets the narrower by going further."

The writings of Douglas Jerrold abound in this method of conveying truths in proverbs, and the proverbs in parables. Thus in the "Man made of Money," "Robert, my dear," said Jenny, with the deferential air of a scholar; "Robert, what did Sir Carraways mean when he said he hated dog—dogmatism?" Topps was puzzled. "Robert, my dear," Jenny urged, "what—what, in the world is dogmatism?" Now it was the weakness of

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Topps never to confess ignorance of any thing-soever to his wife. A man should never do it. Topps had been known, in convivial seasons, to declare, "it makes 'em conceited;" whereupon Topps prepared himself as was his wont to make solemn satisfying answer. Taking off his hat, and smoothing the wrinkles of his brow, Topps said—"Humph! what is dogmatism? why, it is this, of course—*dogmatism is happyism come to its full growth.*

Something like this is that other merry saying, in the same book, not inaptly describing much of the pseudo-benevolence of the world. "'Pon my word, you are so good, you would pour rose water over a toad." "It is in this sense," say Hazlitt, dilating upon the power of wit, "thus to give forth aphorisms and rules for the conduct of life, and to tell home-truths in a most unexpected manner. In this sense Æsop was the greatest wit and moralist that ever lived. Ape and slave, he looked askance at human nature, and beheld its weaknesses and errors transferred to another species. Vice and virtue were to him as plain as any objects of sense. He saw in Man a talking, absurd, obstinate, proud, angry animal; and clothed these abstractions with wings, or a beak, or a tail, or long ears, or claws, as they appeared embodied in the brute creation. His moral philosophy is natural history. He makes an ass bray wisdom

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and a frog croak humanity. The store of moral truth, and the fund of invention in exhibiting it, in its eternal forms palpable and intelligible, and delightful to children and grown persons, and to all ages and nations, are almost miraculous. The invention of a fable is to me the most enviable exertion of human genius: it is the discovering a truth to which there is no clue, and which, when once found out, can never be forgotten. I would rather have been the author of Æsop's Fables than Euclid's Elements."

The discussion of this matter leads right on to an analysis of the method by which to rectify the evils of society;—and the further the matter is urged, the more do we see that the power of doing this is greatly in the hands of the humourist. The disposition to gag the lips of Wit and Humour, it may be suspected, hides the design, to hold back the light from revealing too freely abuses it is thought desirable to hide. A mistress rebuked her servant girl for not dusting the furniture. "These things are very dusty—look, look!" "If you please, ma'am," said the girl, "it's not the things that's dirty, but it's that nasty sun that comes in and shows the dust on things."

Humour is, as we have said, a wonderful revealer; it shows the disposition of things. That curious old paradox of the philosophy of society, Mandeville's "Fable of the Bees," will be known

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in some measure to most of our readers. This, and Burke's "Vindication of Natural Society" may be classed together as satiric pictures; nor is the first, unpopular as it has ever been, more severe than many of the essays of other cynics. Neither is it wholly without truth or instruction; but the refutation of it is carried by every person in the intellect and the affections. It is, perhaps, the best satire and the worst philosophy ever written. Mandeville, in this celebrated book, ascribes the greatness of England to two causes—to the Reformation, and to the invention of hooped and quilted petticoats. A certain amount of ignorance is necessary to the order and stability of society. Everybody is a knave; every woman is a rake; and the reason why these pleasant doctrines are not believed, is because everybody loves to hear the things well spoken of that he has a hand in—even bailiffs, jail-keepers, and hangmen. If this pleasant book be true, there is no such thing as virtue, no such thing as honesty. Cleanliness is a matter of constitution—no more; crime is a matter of taste—no less. "Should one who had the countenance of a gentleman ask me," said Shaftesbury, "why I would avoid being nasty when nobody was present?—in the first place I should be fully satisfied that he was himself a very nasty gentleman who could ask the question." Thus the central question of old Mandeville's book is—why

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should a man be honest in the dark? It is characterised by a bluntness in the moral sense, which is best displayed by simply reading the book itself. Vice is beneficial to society; the frugality of virtue is injurious; men are preserved honest, not because there is any sense of justice in the world, or in the mind of man, but because, somehow, or other, jails and gallowses stand most unpleasantly in the front of the dishonest or unjust actions; thus, there is no virtue. Virtue, whether for reward in this life, or the next, is but another name for vicious interest. Yet, Mandeville's book has passed into more actions than libraries; and wherever society is infected by a virtue so diseased as this, there is a fair field for the humourist or the satirist to display his power.

We discover now, then, not only that *Humour the Teacher*, *but Wit the Scourger*, have their value; not merely in the market, at the bookseller's shop, but in the world; they fulfil an office and a mission for the moral health of man. Wit, perhaps, may be reprobated as a perpetual disposition, not as an occasional manifestation. There are pachydermatious animals in the moral world, there are thick-skinned sins, that can only be pierced by the sharp shafts of wit and satire.

> "I own I'm proud, I must be proud, to see
> Men not afraid of God, afraid of me,"

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Was the daring boast of Pope, in what may be called *the Age of Satirists*, in England; it was an age of corruption, peculation, and fraud; and infamy abounded everywhere; every man appeared to have his price, every thing was bought and sold; the coronet of the earl, the star of knighthood, the ermine of the judge, and the lawn of the prelate, they were the badges of apostacy, the regimentals of libertinism. Gentlemen, drest out in the spangles of infamy, walked about, and thought themselves very pretty fellows, after selling their sister, their wife, or themselves: dissimulation and effrontery went forth, bold and unblushing; here were targets for the scorn of the satirist. And we find, during this period, that all the greatest names of our literature distinguished themselves in this arena, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Young, Gay, and Arbuthnot, all these writers flourished between the period of the restoration of Charles II., and the accession of George II. The social life of England during those years is very mournful to contemplate; the satirist did contemplate it, and the history of the period in its domestic aspects is written in the poetry of Pope, and the fancies of Swift. For the love of our mothers, and our wives, we grieve that any great poet writing, from his experience, a moral essay, should say,

> "Nothing so true as what you once let fall,
> Most women have no characters at all."

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That most charming poem "The Rape of the Lock" abounds in satires, is itself a great satire (as well as the most exquisite effort of ludicrous poetry,) upon the age; we may easily quote, almost at random, a few of the witty antithetical couplets, revealing the state of indifferentism to all principles, which that age especially developed in the neighbourhood of its courts:—

"Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast,
When husbands,—or when lap-dogs breathe their last."

* * * *

So

"To fifty chosen sylphs of special note,
We trust the important charge—the petticoat.

* * * *

Sooner let air, earth, sea, to chaos fall;
Men, monkeys, lap-dogs, parrots, perish all."

The philosophy of Mandeville is very appropriate to the age in which he lived. The Poetry of Pope is a very clear exposition of the age; well did he describe its objects as to

"Dash the proud gamester from his gilded car.
Bare the base heart, that lurks beneath a star;"

and, notwithstanding the bitter scorn, the fiery-winged satire, with which his pages abound, it is

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impossible not to see the independence, honesty, and good sense, at once of his character and his writings. He was far beyond his age. He satirized dukes—he eulogised the Man of Ross;—in a time of universal sycophancy he moved through a circle of courtly parasites, far more upright than, perhaps, any one of them. He provoked the ire of the writing craft, too, upon the publication of the "Dunciad." He was usually accompanied through the streets by a huge Irishman, armed with a club, so that if any Grub-Street author, or scoundrel peer sought to avenge themselves on him, for having been "gibbeted in his rhymes, the Irishman had full commission to conduct the controversy according to the most approved logic of the shelalah." Pope, no doubt, by his poems, did much to clarify the atmosphere of his age. Indeed the worst features died out before he fairly came into the ascendant. Looking back upon those times, they appear to us one great absurdity. No other period of our country's history is so inglorious. Public life was without honour, and private without trust. Man lived without friendship, without soul. It is the utter absence of everything conducing to the welfare of society, of everything that appears to us beautiful and worthy of estimation that lends to the literature of the times so absurd an interest; thus in the "Country Wife of Wycherley," a comrade is ad-

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dressed, "I can deny thee nothing: for though I have known thee a great while, never go,—if I do not love thee as well as a new acquaintance." Everything about that age was absurd; its speech, its dress, its manners, its morals, and its amusements.

Even its wit was so incessant that it became absurd too; there was an everlasting imitation of French manners and conversation. Every word was expected to sparkle; the lips were not to open except to utter an antithesis, or a *double entendre*. In the writings of the time, those dramatists, especially to whom we have made reference, this is ridiculously observable. Leigh Hunt, in his edition of Congreve, Vanburgh, and Wycherly, notices it, and says:—

"Above all, we find the *wit* becomes tiresome. We love it heartily in its proper place, in Butler, Swift, and Addison, where it is serving some purpose greater than itself; and we love it still more when it issues out of sheer animal spirits, and is happy as a child. But wit, for wit's sake becomes a task and a trial: and in Congreve's days it was cant, like the talk about 'sense,' and 'reason;' as if all sense, and reason, and wit had been comprised in the substitution of the greater faculties of Man for the less, and the critical for the unconscious. Everybody was to be 'witty;' letters were to be full of 'wit,' and end in some 'witty

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turn;' coffee-houses were to talk nothing but wit. Ladies were to have 'wit and sweetness,' and men 'wit and fire;' not the old mother-wit of Shakspeare and his fellows, which was a gift from the whole loving frame of Nature, but a trick of the fancy and of words, which you might acquire from the brother-wit of the tavern, and which dealt chiefly in simile, with a variation of antitheses.—Everything seemed to be of value, only in as much as it could be likened or opposed to something else; till at length a simile and a metaphor came to be taken for a 'reason,' and 'sense' itself was occupied, not in seeing into anything very deeply for its own sake, but in discovering how far it was capable of being split off into a couple of images."

There was plenty of work for satirists, especially for an honest one like Pope. Stung to indignation by finding in every circle the "morals of a brothel and the manners of a dancing-master," the sparks of his pen fell swift and fast, straight upon the fools and the follies by which he was surrounded; and pity, indeed, it is, that useful as he was to his age, he was not reserved for one less artificial. Had he been surrounded less by the charlatans and fops; by the magnificence and meanness, and the prating poverty of empty pride; had reality met him in his dealings with life, how much more worthy might have been his works than they are!

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how much less artificial in their structure! how much more noble and universal in their aim! and, therefore, how much more abiding in their influence!

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CHAPTER V.

THE LOGIC OF WIT.

THE influence of satire upon the moulding or changing of manners, leads us to say something of *the Logic of Wit*, one of its chief intentions. It is the most flaying logic ever wielded, and dashes down immense piles of scholastic reasoning and rhetoric with a single blow—sometimes with a gentleness scarcely amounting to a blow. The wit plays and trifles with the time-worn error, dandles and pats it even as a cat might a mouse. In this way wit has done good service to the world: this is a mode of reasoning usually adopted in proportion to the enslavement of a great and spirited people. In England we know nothing of the fierceness of the Italian pasquinade, or the ebullition of political fervour and vehemence in French songs and theatrical performances; where expression may be safely and freely indulged, it does not seek vent in inuendoes and caricatures—it does not

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make subterfuges of words, and with a tremulous hand sketch pictures to the eye. Perhaps if it were not for social or political esclavage, a satirist would seldom find occasion or opportunity to speak; his destructiveness would flow forth in altogether another channel—in declamation and denunciation; for the satiric temper is usually not unmixed with fear or hesitancy. Satirists are seldom disposed to be martyrs; spleen and disappointment enter in no inconsiderable degree into the hidden motives, disguised although they may be, frequently from themselves.

From time immemorial, the method of representing Satan, the terrible Spirit of Evil, was by a sort of grotesque painting. In old times the pulpit gave some representations; and, worse still, the nursery abounded with tales of the frightful gestative powers and tendencies of this fearful being.

It is said of Cuvier, that one day, walking where Æneas is said to have walked, a certain repulsive personage met him, and demanded of him worship.

"No, I will not worship you," said Cuvier.

"Yes, you must," said the horrible.

"No, I will not," replied the other.

"Then," said the demon, "if you will not, I will eat you."

Cuvier eyed him deliberately; and instead of defying him, as no doubt he might have done, pre-

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ferred falling back upon the natural-history lessons of his mundane life, and said, "Horns and cloven feet—*graminivorous*. *You eat me—Nonsense.*"

The logic of irony has no slight influence in changing the absurdities and conventionalisms of society: take, for instance, the cant of criticism.—Sterne's blow at it would be scarcely felt by some of the thick-skinned offenders in this walk, in our time; the would-be critics who hang up their atrocious and monstrous daubs in their drawing-rooms, and talk learnedly to you of *chiaro obscuro*, boldness of outline, breadth of expression, warmth of colouring, delicacy of the tint, fineness of the flesh, &c.,—and call upon you to admire a piece of horrid deformity, because it tapped their pocket to the tune of several hundreds of pounds. These rhapsodical creatures, who never were touched by the feeling of the beautiful, would discourse and rant for hours upon the chasteness of colouring, and the beauties of light and shade, and foreground and perspective upon a board-fence. Now N. P. Willis brings the logic of irony into fine mock gravity upon these gentlemen. Thus he criticises pictures in his exhibition.

"No. 1. *Boy twisting a pig's tail.* The *tone* of this picture is admirable. The pig's foot in the foreground is capital, and the melancholy expression of his face, when enduring the torture, is worthy of Raphael. The turn in the boy's arm,

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while giving the twist, is perhaps too much in shadow, but this is a trifling blemish. The picture was formerly in possession of Cardinal *Lazzaroni*. Price, 201 dollars, 37 cents.

"No. 2. *Woman selling doughnuts*. Titian. We should know this to be one of Titian's by its *chiaro obscuro*. Mark the beautiful "done brown" appearance of the doughnut in the left corner of the basket. It is nature itself. The heel of the woman's shoe is in admirable keeping with the hole in her stocking. The picture was formerly in the palace of Prince Muzby *Fuzzy*, at Florence.—Value, 313 dollars, 12 and a half cents."

There is another kind of cant—the cant of "the good old times," of the "Old England" school—"our glorious constitution," and "our ancient institutions." To these people the beau ideal of all times was England some centuries since. We are sad people to what we were then. There was happiness in the old times, freedom in the old times, plenty in the old times, equality in the old times. Now Douglas Jerrold, that great master of the logic of irony, in "Punch," thus brings the old times under its burning lashes:—

"One of the toasts proposed at the conservative dinner, at Covent Garden was, 'Our Ancient Institutions.' Punch very much questions if those who drank it knew what they were drinking. By this, he means no insinuation against the wine; al

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though he will confess, for himself, that he never dined at a public dinner yet, at which he did not wonder what the Port and Sherry were made of.—He would ask whether, when 'Our Ancient Institutions' were drunk, the company had any idea of what they swallowed? Because, if not, he begs to tell them—and, in case they are jolly fellows, the information may be worth having, that the said toast may be very advantageously subdivided into several others, which, celebrated with a bumper each, would go far to make any gentleman comfortable. He will just mention a few:

'The forest laws.'

'The Feudal System: with the Power of Pit and Gallows.'

'Trial by Battle and Ordeal;' which last toast might be coupled with 'Speed the hot Ploughshare.'

'The application of Dental Surgery, for the increase of the Crown Revenue, to Gentlemen of the Hebrew Persuasion.'

'The Statue De Aæretico Comburendo.'

'Ditto, against Witchcraft.'

'The Star Chamber.'

'The "Peine Forte et Dure;" and Examination by Torture.'

'Hanging, Drawing, and Quartering.'

'The Penal Laws, with the Test and Corporation Acts.'

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'The good old Criminal Code, with its Punishment of Death for stealing a yard of muslin.'

'In connection with the above, various accessory tables, emblematical of the wisdom and goodness of our ancestors, so evinced in their institutions, might be proposed; as, 'The Rack,' 'The Thumbscrews,' and 'The Scavenger's Daughter.'"

A fine example of the *Logic of Irony* may be cited from a speech by Mr., now Lord Brougham, delivered during the visit of George IV. to Scotland:—

"His Majesty, almost at the time in which I am speaking, is about to make a progress through the northern provinces of this island, accompanied by certain of his counsellors—a portion of men who enjoy unenvied, and in an equal degree, the admiration of other countries and the wonder of their own,—and there the prince will see much loyalty, great learning, some splendour, the remains of an ancient monarchy, and of the institutions which made it flourish—but one thing he will not see, (strange as it may seem, and to many who hear me, incredible,) from one end of the country to the other, he will see no such thing as a bishop; not such a thing is to be found from the Tweed to John o'Groat's: not a mitre; no, not so much as a minor canon, or even a rural dean! and in all the land, not even a single curate. So entirely rude are they in Scotland—in such outer darkness do

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they sit, that they support no cathedrals, maintain no pluralists, suffer no non-residence; nay, the poor benighted creatures are even ignorant of tithes. Not a sheaf, or a lamb, or a pig, or the value of a plough-penny, do the hapless mortals render from year's end to year's end! Piteous is their lot! What makes it infinitely more touching is to witness the return of good for evil in the demeanour of this wretched race. Under all this cruel neglect of their spiritual concerns, they are actually the most loyal, contented, moral, and religious people anywhere, perhaps, to be found in the world! Let us hope that his majesty may return safe from the dangers of his excursion into such a country; an excursion most perilous to a certain portion of the church, should his royal mind be infected with a taste for cheap establishments, a working clergy, and a pious congregation."*

"Is it not right," said a gentleman, advocating the justice and propriety of a hereditary nobility, "in order to hand down to posterity the virtues of those who have been eminent for their services to the country, that their posterity should enjoy the honours conferred on them as a reward for such services!" "By the same rule," said a lady, "if a man is hung for his misdeeds, all his posterity should be hanged too." And the justness of this logical witticism cannot be disputed.

* Speech for Ambrose Williams, August 6, 1822.

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Sydney Smith wielded the logic of wit with wonderful power. Curt, smart, and unanswerable fell his blows. Thus, on the wants of Ireland, "what," says he, "is the object of all good government? The object of all good government is roast mutton, potatoes, claret, a stout constable, an honest justice, a clean highway, a free chapel. What trash to be bawling in the streets about the Green Isle, and the Isle of the Ocean; the bold anthem of Erin go Bragh! a far better anthem would be Erin go bread and cheese! Erin go cabins that keep out the rain! Erin go pantaloons without holes in them!" This, to be sure, does not altogether settle the Irish question, but the logic of wit is usually the logic of common sense too.

Rightly used, without the licence in which only indeed, unbalanced minds indulge, wit is of far more value in the senate than eloquence; nay, probably, every where wit has better served the world. It places topics and subjects in a strong, but usually in a true, light; if it did not this, it would not be wit. It places the follies of an argument in full clear view; it relieves the monotony of the most vexatious details or impalpable abstractions. Wit of this kind of the logical order is too full to be diffuse in language; the thing has to be said, and it is said; to wrap it up in fold on fold of language, would only be to maim its power; the shaft flies, if it fly from the true hand it sticks

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there, it is irresistible, fatal to the doctrine or the teacher against which it is aimed. By the logic of wit we do not mean bravado, inuendo, sarcasm, or irony; neither the pert sneer, or the rounded phrase, but the insight into the moral defects of a calculation, its inconsistency with humanity, its hollowness, and unfitness. More than any modern political writer, Colonel Thompson possesses the power of making error ridiculous, in a phrase, by giving importance to a truth by holding up its light in the shade of its opposite. How clever is his definition of political economy, as "the art of preventing ourselves from being robbed by our betters. It is the grand expositor of the peccadilloes of those who volunteer to benefit mankind by governing; its professors form the grand Anti-felony-Association of modern times. It picks up swindlers of all calibres, as the *Roc* does elephants; and is a very ferret to the vermin that nestle in our barns and manufactories."

These remarks upon the logic of wit, lead us to say further, that a man is unfitted to communicate truth to others, in the degree in which he is wanting in humour. It is this faculty which brings out into plain and clear view the meaning of a matter, it illustrates a truth and makes it human; the people read the humourist, they follow him when he appears on the platform or at the lecturer's desk, because he makes things plain and intelligible to

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the eye and to the heart; and if a man possess this power, he will make everything plain, however abstract, and apparently inappropriate. To cite one instance from hundreds, let us mention the writings of Dr. Edward Johnson. Medicine has usually a most forbidding and revolting aspect to the popular mind; it is not a subject with which the humourist can often deal; but, as a humourist, Dr. Johnson seizes its details, and amuses while he instructs us. Thus he talks to us about cancer, and the necessity of a thorough change in the system, before cancer can be eradicated.

"If we would cure cancer, therefore, we must cure the habit of body which produces it. * * The cancer is to the system what the dirt-heap is to the Irish cabin. The dirt-heap grows bigger and bigger by continual additions thrown outside the door. Clear away the dirt-heap, and block up the door. What then? Why, a new dirt-heap will appear on the other side of the cabin, which will be formed, and will grow, by continual additions, thrown out through a new door, or through the window. How, then, is this Irish dirt-heap to be cured? Why, by turning the pigs and the cows, the cocks and the hens, out of the cabin, to be sure, and so keeping the cabin clean within, in order that there may be no dirt to be thrown out. The Irish dirt-heap may be called a local disease, if you will; but it clearly depends upon the general

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disease of the cabin—that is, the general filthiness within. The dirt-heap is only the result of general internal dirtiness."*

And thus Dr. Johnson illustrates the reason why as fast as one cancer is cured, another appears in the same, or a different place.

Again and again, then, are we reminded that Ridicule is a logician; to be sure it has for the most part the object of analogy rather than induction; but analogy is comprehended by thousands, to whom the ratiocinative method would be obscure; and therefore all teachers, who would be successful in their mission to the people, should arm themselves with the cheerful, obvious, homely illustration.

We have been pleading for laughter; we are pleading for the proper and restricted introduction of humour into popular discourse. This is thought frequently beneath the dignity of the platform or the lecturer's table: nothing is beneath the dignity of the lecturer's office that tends to make truth more palpable to the understanding. A sprightly allusion, a well-narrated anecdote, a lively sally of wit, a graphic sketch of homely life—these will relieve the tedium of many a long and most excellent discourse, and save the auditor from nodding. The teacher should cater for all orders of mind: it may be that some apprehend the first strokes of

* Domestic Practice of Hydropathy, p. 56.

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his instruction; but the humbler intellects are in all congregations, and amongst all readers; and the proposition, self-evident to the advanced mind, should be by the crayon sketchings of Wit being brought home to the more lowly orders of Intelligence.

RABELAIS was and is the great master of this logic of wit. To those who can read him, certainly, his wit and humour, his apologues and allegories, satires and pasquinades, puns, clenches, conundrums, and quibbles, float about in a perfect ocean of filth. "To the pure all things are pure," —but these volumes may not inappropriately be termed—the literature of nastiness; this said, however, it is unquestionable that whoever reads it is carried along by the resistless torrent of undulating humour.

The curate of a small parish, he yet had numerous opportunities of knowing the world, and he laughed most heartily at much he knew. To him the transactions of his time appeared admirably ridiculous; that stabbers and bandits should call themselves kings, and princes—that ignorant priests, and doctors, and magicians, should palm themselves upon mankind, and make men worship and pay homage to their superstitions and quackeries—that the harlots of princes should command the souls and the property of the nation, and vicious friars should spawn their uncleanliness and

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impiety upon the people: all this was to Rabelais exquisitely ludicrous, and he burst forth in a roar of riotous laughter; but beneath that laughter the thoughtful will not fail to note, that sadness must have originated such a vehement passion of merriment—a sympathy with deluded and misused humanity; beneath those turbid heavings of humour how profound must have been the emotions of compassion, and scorn! Nowhere else in literature do we so clearly perceive *the meaning of the word Satirist*—SATYR-ist, as applied to the wit. The writings of Rabelais create a PAN-*ic* in the understanding. Kings, queens, cardinals, and nobles, he tumbles them about with elfish caprice; he inverts all dignities and honours, and treats the tyrants of the earth as so many mischievous children. In him and his writings we see the meaning of the significant Grecian mythology, which represented beautiful Nature itself as a combination of discordances. Pan piping to the shepherds was musical, human and prophetic; yet, with cloven feet, and hairy like a goat, in Pan were united foul lust, and human, nay, celestial beauty.* This was a Satyr; and here are not only the etymologies of names, but the originals of emotions, and things. Mysterious fear, and awe, and madness thus came to be named *Panic*, and Rabelais, we say, is this being. Combinations meet, in these

* Thomas Carlyle.

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books, of purity in the idea, and uncleanness in the utterance: the foul expression was a veil to conceal from the eyes of brutal and licentious priests a sentiment they would not have cared to comprehend—a sentiment which might have been dangerous to the life of an author. The life of Rabelais was held together by practical jokes and witticisms, reflecting on the follies of his time, but more especially the religious follies; passing by these, it may be safely said that "Pantagruel" cannot be understood without a constant reference to, and an intimate knowledge of the times in which Rabelais wrote: it is full of allusions to circumstances of local occurrence, but of universal interest.

In the Prologue to the Third Book, he tells a comical tale of Diogenes, whom he seems not a little to have admired and resembled; who, seeing the people of Corinth all very busy in preparations for war, and himself not invited to help them, rolled and tossed about his tub, that he might not be said to be idle: and to this he likens his book. "For," said he, "I held it not a little disgraceful to be an idle spectator of so many valorous, eloquent, and valiant persons, who, in the view and sight of all Europe, act this notable interlude or tragic comedy." This notable circumstance was the holding the Council of Trent; and this alone is a key to many of the characters of the volumes.

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The quiet allusions made to passing circumstances have never been sufficiently noticed and commented on. Let one instance serve as an illustration.

With how keen an appetite Rabelais pounced upon the follies transacting around him, and made them subservient to the purposes of his risibility. Motteaux says, "I ought not here to omit a remark, printed in the last Dutch edition of this book, concerning what Panurge says of Cretin.* 'he is, by the virtue of an ox, an arrant heretic—a thorough-paced, rivetted heretic—I say a rooted, combustible heretic—one as fit to burn as the little wooden clock at Rochelle; his soul goeth to thirty thousand carts full of devils.' Rabelais there reflects on the sentence of death passed on one of the first, that owned himself a Protestant, at Rochelle. He was a watchmaker, and had made a clock all of wood, which was esteemed an admirable piece of work; but because it was the work of one condemned for heresy, the judges ordered by the same sentence that the clock should be burned by the common hangman, and it was burned accordingly. We must also observe that the adjective '*clavelé*' that is, full of nails or rivetted, is brought in because that watchmaker, who was very famous for his zeal, was named Clavele." There was a method in the mirth of this wonderful French curate, although few dug the method from the

* Character in Rabelais' "Pantagruel."

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mine. No wonder that his friends wept round his death-bed, and still less wonder that he turned, even there, a merry face upon them, and said,—"Ah, you rogues! if I were to die ten times over, I should never make you cry half so much as I have made you laugh."

SWIFT is our English Rabelais, and perhaps the logic of wit blazes more in his writings than in any of the writings of the school: for muscular energy and force, his works are unequalled; but the view he takes of the affairs of this world is misanthropic. There is no higher light or law than the understanding: he is therefore only a satirist; all his power is wielded to crush, never to build; he has a keener eye for the deformities than for the harmonies of mankind: the roughness of his mind usually held him captive; although he was not wanting in tenderness, he never manifested it in anything that fell from his pen; coarseness is his perpetual fault,—but it must be admitted that every kind of wit is laid under contribution by him: here are pert allusions to well-known stories, —here are forged innumerable apposite tales, "tart irony, and rusty hyperbole," scenic representations, moral political romances, are sketched in hieroglyphic characters; but everywhere the effect upon the mind is only wonderful. In the travels of Gulliver to Lilliput the logic of irony is employed to ridicule the presumptuous dogmatism of little

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men on great things. In the travels to Brobdignag the same weapons are used to exhibit the folly of the employment of great powers and mental gifts upon trifling occupations: and still better in the "Battle of the Books," the disputes of learning are held up to the lightnings of satire. Swift clothed all he advanced in a vesture of such apparent reality, that it is difficult, sometimes, to resist the impression, that even in the most fictitious narratives he is describing real circumstances. Never was so rich a hoax palmed upon man as his prophecy that Partridge, a celebrated almanack maker, quack, and astrologer, would die upon a certain day: he published this prophecy under the name of Bickerstaff. This was followed by an account of the death of the poor quack, written with exceeding gravity and seriousness. But Partridge was not minded to be dispatched thus: he replied to the account asserting his existence, and treating Isaac Bickerstaff rather roughly. But Swift replied again: in an ingenious and most ludicrous paper, he sets forth a number of quirkish reasons to prove that Partridge must be dead; and lastly argues, with the most ridiculous ingenuity, that the quack's own testimony to his existence cannot be for a moment admitted, as he was too notorious a liar to be entitled to belief on so important a point.

These papers, with several other similar ones,

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were intended as severe strokes upon the follies of the age of the satirist. They are not only temporary, but local; but they are so artful in the power of the language, and the adaptation of the local peculiarities, that they must be ever read with pleasure.

All the tales of VOLTAIRE may be classified beneath the logic of Wit—many of them, indeed, extravagant and satiric, and therefore far from the highest order of wit, yet they all, in their ultimate intention, sought to bring the social heart to a more healthy pulsation. Voltaire more closely resembled Swift than Swift resembled Rabelais, and both in the short, smart, allegorical stories, and the more lengthy and seriously-planned fictions, alike in his Prose or his Verse, except when he becomes dramatic, his genius resembles the Dean's. Micromegas in something the same fashion, but in a more condensed manner, would teach the same lessons for which Gulliver set forth on his travels. Candidus perpetually reminds us of the "Tale of a Tub," and the "Battle of the Books. The characters of the two men, in mere personal individuality, resembled each other. They neither of them were hearty believers, but both hearty haters. They were both dark, fierce, and misanthropic spirits; the influence of both was imperial: they were both monarchs more truly than any princes of their age. They were both the creatures of freak and caprice,

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—both as tetchy, as irritable as spoiled children. In definite, mental character, Voltaire appears to have had the most enlarged knowledge—Swift the most enlarged wisdom; Voltaire approached nearest to the Wit, and Swift nearest to the Humourist; but to both, notwithstanding the force and fulness of the latter, the character of the Satirist almost exclusively belongs. They both had a downright way of talking; earnestness in either we think is to be looked for in vain. But both determined to make their readers understand them, for in fact they both had a very clear understanding themselves of every topic on which they determined to write. It is the understanding or logical power which holds up to ridicule; Pangloss the optimist, who taught metaphysico-theologicosmolonigology, proving that this was the best of all possible worlds. "It is demonstrable," said he, "that things cannot be otherwise than they are; for all things having been made for some end, they must necessarily be intended for the best end. Observe well that the nose has been made for carrying spectacles; therefore we have spectacles:—the legs are visibly designed for stockings; and, therefore, we have stockings. Stones have been formed to be hewn, and to make castles; and, therefore, my lord has a very fine castle, and the greatest baron of the province ought to be the best lodged.—Swine were made to be ate; and, therefore, we eat

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pork all the year round: consequently those who have asserted that all things are good, have said a very foolish thing; they should have said that all is for the best."

It is surely in a similar strain that Swift introduces himself in the "Tale of a Tub;" and by way of apology for entering the ranks of authors, begs to tell a story for the edification of the reader. Times are changed; and to the fastidious it may now seem a piece of coarse vulgarity—well, so it is; but if we ransacked our ten volumes of the writings of the Dean we could find no more illustrative specimen of his style.

"A mountebank, in Leicester-fields, had drawn a huge assembly about him. Among the rest, a fat, unwieldy fellow, half-stifled in the press, would be every fit crying out,—"L—d, what a filthy crowd is here!" "Pray, good people, give way a little!" "Bless me! what devil has raked this crowd together!" "Zounds, what a squeezing is this!" "Honest friend, remove your elbow!" At last *a weaver*, that stood next to him, could hold no longer:—"A plague confound you," said he, "for an overgrown sloven! and who, in the d——l's name, I wonder, helps to make up the crowd half so much as yourself? Don't you consider that you take up more room with that carcass than any five here? Is not the place as free for us as you? Bring your own guts to a reasonable

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compass and be d——d; and then I'll engage we shall have room for us all."*

In seeking for forcible expressions, it has very usually been the case that language has been employed, by the professors of satire and humour, most unclean and depraving. There are few of the classic authors of England against whom this charge may not, with perfect justice be brought. It is pre-eminently true of all those whose names we have quoted. Our own times have indeed given birth to another race,—men who have cultivated force of language without cultivating an acquaintance with foulness;—who have not sought the acquaintance of dirty images, for the purpose of conveying pure and exalted truths and sentiments. There certainly is every reason why forcible thought, winged by forcible language, should be kept free from the taint and defilement of grossness and impurity. Swift, like Rabelais, was shamefully dirty; and seemed to think, as many thought, that the short weight of language —though his readers will seldom complain of that —might be eked out by filth. But these men,—satirists of manners and thoughts, logicians of wit and humour—wrought a work for the rectification of judgments which never could have been effected, perhaps, on so large a scale by any means so well as those he employed. They presented Nature

* Swift's Works, Vol. I, p. 31.

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distorted to the eyes of their readers, in order that they might more clearly present to them the more solemn pictures of mental and moral incongruities. It appears most necessary, that at the time especially when Swift wrote, that the knowledge presented to the mind or the eye should startle almost by its broad coarseness. He put old world oddities and prejudices, held in reverence in his own day, in a simple and plain light, as for instance, his passage on "difference of opinions," he groups together the causes of the disputes between the Papists and Protestants.

"Difference in opinion has cost many millions of lives. For instance, whether flesh be bread, or bread be flesh—whether the juice of a certain berry be blood or wine—whether whistling be a vice or a virtue—whether it be best to kiss a post or throw it into the fire—what is the best colour of a coat—whether it be black, white, red, or grey—whether it should be long or short, narrow or wide, dirty or clean, with many more. Neither are there any wars so furious and bloody, or of so long continuance as those occasioned by difference in opinion; especially if it be in things indifferent."

Our readers will immediately recognise in these points of dispute so allegorically put, the doctrine of the real presence; of the use of music in worship; of the adoration of the Holy Cross; of the use of robes in divine service, and so on. Our

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readers must look through the travels of Gulliver for similar allusions. The rivalries of the Lilliputians for assistance with the Blefuscudians satirise the wars of France and England—the wearers of high-heeled and low-heeled shoes—the High and Low Church party—we can well believe that a method so broad as this, was the only method, to convey in that day such ideas to the many.

We may speak of the wit of MACAULAY as frequently, thus keenly, logical; that is, he gives his reasons; he states his objections; he sums his arguments, in brief and powerful antithetical language; and antithesis, in some form or other, is the soul of all wit. Frequently, in this writer, the antithetical temper is carried to paradox. He delights in taking that view of a question which presents the greatest number of contrarieties, or which is, perhaps, itself, one great contrariety; and frequently, in his hands, even the paradox is irresistible. This is the characteristic of his oratory. Upon a paradox he will hang an argument—this is the source of those defects which mark his brilliant writings—this is the hinge upon which many of the noblest passages of his works, his most gorgeous descriptions turn,—the antithesis of character, the antithesis of expression. He uses it as a foil to bring out very frequently the story he wishes to relate. There is scarcely a great paper, or a great passage, in his

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essays, or in his history, but it derives its strength and force from this vivid perception of contraries. The reader, who would see this illustrated, may find it in his Comparative Analysis of the Platonic and Baconian Philosophy;* his Criticism upon the Macchiavelian Philosophy;† his noble characterization of the Puritans;‡ and the delineation of the relative empires of the Papal and Protestant Faiths.§ Our readers shall notice how this elegant writer employs this antithetical weapon. He thus draws a comparison between the philosophy of Bacon and of Epictetus:—

"We have sometimes thought that an amusing fiction might be written, in which a disciple of Epictetus, and a disciple of Bacon should be introduced as fellow travellers. They come to a village where the small-pox has just begun to rage, and find houses shut up, intercourse suspended, the sick abandoned, mothers weeping in terror over their children. The Stoic assures the dismayed population that there is nothing bad in the small-pox, and that, to a wise man, disease, deformity, death, the loss of friends, are not evils. The Baconian takes out a lancet, and begins to vacciuate. They find a body of miners in great dismay. An explosion of noisome vapours has just killed many of those who were at work; and the survivors are

* Lord Bacon's Essays, Vol. ii. † Macchiavelli, Vol. i.
‡ Milton, Vol i. § Essay on Ranke's History of Popes, Vol. iii.

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afraid to enter into the cavern. The Stoic assures them that such an accident is nothing but a mere casualty. The Baconian, who has no such fine word at his command, contents himself with devising a safety lamp. They find a ship-wrecked merchant wringing his hands on the shore. His vessel, with an inestimable cargo, has just gone down, and he is reduced from opulence to beggary. The Stoic exhorts him not to seek happiness in things which lie without himself, and repeats a whole chapter of Epictetus. The Baconian constructs a diving bell, goes down in it, and returns with the most precious effects from the wreck. It would be easy to multiply illustrations of the difference between the philosophy of thorns, and the philosophy of fruit; the philosophy of words and the philosophy of works."*

But sometimes we have this logic of Characterization in a line or two. There are many instances in which he thus profiles his contemporaries. "Dr. Southey has two faculties which were never, we believe, vouchsafed in a measure so copious to any human being—the faculty of believing without a reason, and the faculty of hating without a provocation," poor Cagliostro Montgomery, whose writings have sold far better, to the disgrace of the age, be it said, than the sweet breathings of his namesake, James Mont-

* Essay on Bacon, Vol. ii., p. 400-401.

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gomery. Mr. Macaulay assures us, "that his writing bears the same relation to poetry that a Turkey carpet bears to a picture. There are colours in the Turkey carpet, out of which a picture might be made. There are words in Mr. Montgomery's writing which, when disposed in certain orders and combinations, have made, and will make, again, good poetry. But as they now stand, they seem to be put together, on principle, in such a manner as to give no image of any thing 'in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth.'" Throughout the criticism, the works of Robert Montgomery are characterised as belonging to the Turkey Carpet School of Literature, and our readers will recognise the epithet, not only as suitable to him, but to a very large club of writers of our day, who appear to believe a promiscuous lumping together of sonorous words is poetry and eloquence. Mr. Montgomery's poem, called "Satan," is thus ridiculed. "Satan has not one satanic quality. Mad Tom has told us that the Prince of Darkness is a gentleman; but we had to learn that he is a respectable and pious gentleman, whose principal fault is, that he is something of a twaddle, and far too liberal of his good advice. That happy change in his character which Origin anticipated, and of which Tillotson did not despair, seems to be rapidly taking place. Bad habits are not eradicated in a

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moment. It is not strange, therefore, that so old an offender should now and then relapse for a short time into a wrong disposition. But to give him his due, as the proverb recommends, we must say, that he always returns after two or three lines of impiety to his preaching style." Thus the two great commandments of Lord Byron's system of ethics are said to be "to hate your neighbour and to love your neighbour's wife." And thus, in the same antithetical manner, he tells us that "society is constantly advancing in knowledge. The tail is now where the head was some generations ago. But the head and tail still keep their distance."

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CHAPTER VI.

THE HUMOURIST AND THE SATIRIST.

In any attempt to make young students comprehend the nature of humour, and its office and mission to the world, a large space should be given to the character and writings of Richter—of the the beautiful and glorious Jean Paul. Was he not greatest minister of pure humour the world has yet had? When we speak of him thus, we understand the term humour in its largest, highest, widest, sense. His insight into the universe of things was truly wonderful, in this, then, we adhere to our characterization, a few pages back. Incongruities giving virtue to harmonies, incoherences, and unknown tongues; giving forth, at least, some great sphere harmony jarring notes. Reconciled humour rules even his most serious works. Humour growing out of love, springing from the heart rather than the imagination; a sense of contrasts felt rather than seen. His bio-

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grapher remarks that, "he had an eye open to beauty, but that he also had no disgust at deformity," but the next sentence places the matter in its true light. "He seems to have imagined beauty in all deformity except that of vice." In every form of human life, he discovered moral beauty. The humblest domestic occupation revealed beauty to his view. "The hunting of rats was as heroic as the hunting of hares." The study of Jean Paul has been compared to the entrance into a gallery where innumerable pictures of Corregios and Teniers, of Rembaunt, and of Wouvermans, are hung side by side; where Cecilias and Madonas, alternate with Dutch Boors and Sancho Panzas, and visions of Celestial Beauty are found side by side with Dutch kitchens and mountain cottages.

The shadow of Jean Paul's fame must lengthen as the world grows older. On these pages, we can but breathe a word or two about him. Here is a passage revealing his character to the reader in some degree, as sketched by himself, in unfolding to us the purpose for which he writes. "That I may show to the whole earth, that we ought to value little joys more than great ones; the night-gown more than the dress coat; that Plutus' heaps are worth less than his handfulls; the plum than the penny for a rainy day; and that not great but little heaps can make us happy. Can I accomplish

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this? I shall, by means of my book, bring up for posterity, a race of men finding refreshment in all things; in the warmth of the rooms, and of their nightcaps; in their pillows, in mere Apostles' days, in the evening moral tales of their wives. You perceive my drift is, that man may become like a little tailor bird, which, not amidst the crashing boughs of the storm tost, roaring-immeasurable tree of life, but upon one of its leaves, sews itself a nest together, and then lies snug." Our readers must not expect us to give illustrations of Jean Paul's humour; "he sports with the highest and the lowest, he can play at bowls with the sun and moon." What think our readers of "passages from the Papers of the Devil." "Hesperus; or, the dog post days." Yet, it is a humour that sports through universal Nature;—his spirit drifts away into the land of Dreams;—he is always surrounded by ideal personages, and one method he has of addressing the public is, to write letters to these fictitious personages, as if they were real;—and doubtless, to Jean Paul, they were indeed realities. The maxim of Jean Paul is far better known, than it is known that he was the author of the maxim, that "Providence has given to the English the empire of the sea; to the French that of the land; to the Germans that of the air;" And this has been cited as a description of his genius and truth, never did Humourist

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before so turn all the realities of life to identities. He lived in a realm where few could breathe. He extracted from all life's poisons, purity; and from all life's sorrow, happiness. "In my Historical Lectures," says he, "the business of hungering will, in truth, more and more make its appearance, —with the hero it rises to a great height; about as often as feasting in Thummell's Travels, or tea drinking on Richardson's Clarissa; nevertheless, I cannot help saying to Poverty, 'Welcome! So thou come not at quite too late a time.' Wealth bears heavier on Talent than Poverty. Under gold mountains and thrones, who knows how many a spiritual giant may lie crushed down and buried! When among the flames of youth, and above all, of holier powers as well, the oil of Riches is also poured in, little will remain of the Phœnix but his ashes: and only a Goethe has force to keep, even at the sun of good fortune, his Phœnix wings unsinged. The poor historical professor in this place would not, for much money, have had much money in his youth. Fate manages poets, as men do singing birds; you overhang the cage of the singer and makes it dark, till, at length, he has caught the tunes you play to him, and can sing them rightly."

Now if our readers should even know nothing of Jean Paul's humour, the portrait of the man is before them; and it is just such an honest nature

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and spirit as this that can best read the incongruities of things, as well as the incongruities of men. To spell the word "honesty," a man should be thoroughly honest.

Richter has been said to resemble Sterne: we think not. Sterne is not that thoroughly honest man: there is not unfrequently a false sentiment in his writings. On the whole it is a degradation to the German to make the comparison.

It has been said, a page or two back, that amongst the other things Humour possesses the power to destroy, is false sentiment. In the true humourist, on the contrary, humour heightens the charm of tenderness and deepens the tone of pathos and feeling.

So far as we can judge, and as far as we can learn, thus it is with Richter. We trust the time is coming when these deep mines of profound tenderness and thought—these rich tones of laughter —these pictures of man and of nature in the beautiful primeness of the sheltered retirements of "our old Fatherland," will be accessible to all Englishmen of taste, and be appreciated in a far higher degree than they have ever yet been, either in this land or in any other.

Of all men who ever came to the world to speak the language of laughter, Jean Paul had the highest aim, and fulfilled his mission with the most touching and human earnestness. From his tongue humour indeed becomes divine.

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But whenever is the humourous mentioned without suggesting the name of DICKENS. No one, surely, ever walked so closely on the verge of mere burlesque and caricature, without falling. He is, beyond any other writer, the humourist of his age. Thackray is more severe, because he is a satirist; Jerrold is caustic and didactic; but the humour and the fun, the frolicsome absurdities and unfailing delineations of individual character, as apart from the generalisation of the individual—these Dickens can perfectly draw. Yet can he occasionally generalise an absurdity too. The would-be transcendentalists have their portrait in the presentation of Miss Toppit and Miss Codger, by Mrs. Hominy, to the Honourable Elijah Pogram.

"To be presented to a Pogram," said Miss Codger, "by a Hominy! Indeed a thrilling moment is it in its impressiveness on what we call our feelings. But why we call them so, or why impressed they are—or if impressed they are at all—or if at all we are—or if there really is, oh, gasping one! a Pogram or a Hominy, or any active principle, to which we give those titles, is a topic, spirit-searching, light-abandoned, much too vast to enter on at this unlooked-for crisis."

"Mind and matter," said the lady in the wig, "glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm ideal, in the whispering chambers of the imagination. To hear

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it sweet it is. But then outlaughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the grotesque, 'What, ho! arrest for me that agency. Go bring it hither!'—And so the vision fadeth."

The opinions of Tony Weller, upon the topics of Matrimony and coaches, are absurdly stamped with the characterization of the individual. Poor old Tony Weller! When Sam sends the Valentine to Mary, his prophetic soul dreads the consequences, and he bursts forth in affecting rebuke :—

"To see you married, Sammy—to see you a deluded wictim, and thinkin' in your innocence, its all very capital—it's a dreadful trial to a father's feelin's, Sammy."

Tony Weller has a dreadful apprehension of widows: he looks upon them as a kind of ogresses, roaming about to eat up all bachelors and widowers—or, worse still, perhaps to enchant them into matrimony against their will. Giving a description of a journey on a railway :—

"I was locked up," he says, "in a close carriage with a living widder; and I believe it wos only because we wos alone, and there was no clergyman in the conweyance, that that 'ere widder didn't marry me before we reached the half-way station."

Tony Weller has been for forty years upon the road as a coachman; he has therefore a wise scorn of all railways and railroads.

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"As for the ingin," says he, "as is always a pourin' out red-hot coals at night, and black smoke in the day, the sensiblest thing it does, in my opinion, is ven there's something in the vay, and it sets up that frightful scream, vich seems to say, 'Now here's two hundred and forty passengers in the werry greatest extremity of danger, and here's their two hundred and forty screams in vun.'"

When Mr. Tigg suddenly embraced Mr. Pecksniff in the dark passage of the Blue Dragon, that worthy gentleman "found himself collared by something which smelt like several damp umbrellas, a barrel of beer, a cask of warm brandy and water, and a small parlour full of tobacco smoke, mixed."

Our citations are given for the purpose of conveying the most general illustration; and, on this topic we surely might venture to make a more lengthy sojourn. The works of Dickens are an encyclopædia of the ludicrous; and this is unquestionably the fault of his mind and style, that he is impelled by some tricksy spirit, to turn every incident into some most strange and fantastic allusion. He makes Nature, in all her moods, to share in this fantastic spirit, as when for instance, "It was a small tyrrany for a respectable wind, to go wreaking its vengeance upon such poor creatures as fallen leaves." Again, "In compliment to which discovery, the brook stood still no longer, but ran

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briskly off, to bear the tidings to the water mill, three miles away." In every mood of gaiety or gloom, Nature, in a thousand places throughout his works is compelled to sympathise with the mental state; and this fantastic spirit, when giving to human character positions, and actions, and sayings, so grotesque as perhaps never found their way in any literature before. This might indicate merely the caricaturist's power, and be disconnected from any breadth of character; but upon a narrower survey, we find it is not so; and every position and saying is really a part of the individuality of the character. Thus, when Sampson Brass lays a trap for Kit Nubbles, to make the poor innocent boy appear as a thief, and the money is found in his box. "And this," he cries, clasping his hands, "this is the world that turns upon its own axis; and has lunar influences, and revolutions, round heavenly bodies, and various games of that sort! This is human nature, is it?"

When Master Wackford Squeers catches poor Smike, his excellent parent exclaims—"You always keep in the same path, and do things that you see your father do, and when you die you will go right slap into heaven, and be asked no questions."

From Pickwick to Copperfield the writings of Dickens abound in this most extraordinary perception and delineation of the ludicrous. Of the higher and more concentrated forms of wit there is

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comparatively but little display; but it has been well said that his works roll and tumble in a sea of humour and fun. His wit does not belong to the school of Swift, of Voltaire, and Fielding, but to that of Smollett, Le Sage, and Cervantes. His laughter is real and hearty, and not all on account of the miseries, sins, and follies, of his fellow-man, but with them in their happy moments, too.

Hence we find, as all the world well knows, that a cheerful and happy view of life streams like sunshine over his pages. Gladsome and blithe, his characters move before us, bearing bravely their portion of life's ills. Cheerful endurance, high effort, from the humblest to the highest—these are the lessons which shine out from all his volumes; and so the things of life, the changes and chances of time,—they are looked upon cheerfully too.—What does he say of that most gruff and remorseless old fellow, Old Time?

"Father Time is not always a hard parent, and though he tarries for none of his children, he lays his hand lightly upon those who have used him well, making them old men and women inexorably enough, but leaving their hearts and spirits young and in full vigour. With such people, the grey head is but the impression of the old fellow's hand in giving them his blessing, and every wrinkle but a notch in the quiet calendar of a well-spent life."

So he goes on with cheerful reflections:—

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"We all change, but that's with Time. Time does his work honestly, and I don't mind him. A fig for Time, sir! use him well, and he's a hearty fellow; but care and suffering are devils—secret, stealthy, undermining devils, who tread down the brightest flowers in Eden, and do more havoc in a month than Time does in years."

It is the constant recurrence throughout his writings of sentiments so genial and beautiful as these, arrayed in the most attractive garb of a happy humour that has made the name of Dickens loved through the whole world, where the English language is spoken or read. Dickens never did as BULWER, too frequently in the first productions of his genius, was in the habit of doing—"dress up a crowd of sharpers and adulterers in the purple and fine linen of Rhetoric, and then demand of us to praise them well in their business."* He keeps in the main, "the high road of life," as Coleridge would call it, and does not deviate to lead a decorative attractiveness to sins, like Rabelais. In this he makes vice a thing for ridicule, when it is not a thing for scorn—Jonas Chuzzlewit, Quilp, Carker,—we laugh at them, although we shudder, they are such fools with all their wickedness. Is not this the true beauty of the humourist, ever revealing to us the higher proportions of humanity? We laugh, because we see what the actors do not

* Edwin P. Whipple.

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see, that they are twisting a net around themselves; that their plots and schemes can only end in their own inveiglement; that a man cannot depart from nature and be happy. The satirist contents himself with showing to us the man departing from nature. The humourist shows to us that every departure from the love and truth of nature is not only ludicrous, but that the wanderer himself is smitten with pain for his vagrancy.

Our remarks upon this writer, so dear to every lover of humanity, are extending to too great a length; but we must remark that, although Dickens seldom, if ever, uses the logic of irony, which we pointed out, a few pages since, in other writers, and never wields the weapons of the mere satirist, no writer has more frequently attacked the inhuman shams of the day. His characters are never caricatures; they are too human and individual for that; but his painting of a great sin, or his illustration of a great argument, is very frequently in the broadest vein of caricature. Witness the following smart blows upon the Malthusian philosophy. It is very sad to know that there are many Tilers, and Cutes, and Bowleys,* too, in the

* We feel some fidgetiness of conscience when we quote a name in fiction very unlike a name in fact. Samuel Bowley, Esq., of Gloucester, is very unlike the Sir Joseph Bowley of "The Chimes." He is, indeed, the Poor Man's Patron. The blessings of thousands that were ready to perish are on him. He is worthy of the county where Raikes taught, and where Jenner practised.

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world,—but they do not represent the philosophy of Malthus, or the benevolence of the Poor Man's Friend.

A young blacksmith is pleasantly interrogated by Mr. Alderman Cute.

"'And you're making love to her—are you?' said Mr. Cute to the young smith.

"'Yes,' returned Richard, quickly, for he was nettled by the question. 'And we are going to be married on New-Year's day.'

"'What do you mean?' cried Filer, sharply. 'Married!'

"'Why, yes, we're thinking of it, master,' said Richard. 'We're rather in a hurry, do you see, in case it should be put down first.'

"'Ah!' cried Filer, with a groan. 'Put THAT down indeed, alderman, and you'll do something. Married! Married!! The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people—their improvidence—their weakness—is, by Heavens! enough to—Now look at that couple, will you?'

"Well! They were worth looking at. And marriage seemed as fair and reasonable a deed as they need have in contemplation.

"'A man may live to be as old as Methuselah,' said Mr. Filer, 'and may labour all his life for the benefit of such people as those; and may heap up facts on figures—facts on figures, mountains high

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and dry; and he can no more hope to persuade 'em that they have no right or business to be married, than he can hope to persuade 'em that they have no earthly right or business to be born. And THAT we know they haven't. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty, long ago.'

"Alderman Cute was mightily diverted, and laid his right forefinger on the side of his nose, as much as to say to both his friends, 'Observe me, will you? Keep your eye on the practical man!'—and called Meg to him.

'Come here, my girl?' said Alderman Cute.

"The young blood of her lover had been mounting wrathfully, within the last few minutes; and he was indisposed to let her come.

"But setting a constraint upon himself, he came forward with a stride, as Meg approached, and stood beside her. Trotty kept her hand within his arm still, but looked from face to face as wildly as a sleeper in a dream.

"'Now I'm going to give you a word or two of good advice, my girl,' said the alderman, in his nice, easy way. 'It's my place to give advice, you know, because I'm a Justice. You know I'm a Justice, don't you?'

"Meg timidly said, 'Yes.' But everybody knew Alderman Cute was a Justice! Oh dear, so active a Justice always! Who such a mote of brightness in the public eye, as Cute!

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"'You are going to be married, you say,' pursued the alderman. 'Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex! But never mind that. After you are married, you'll quarrel with your husband, and come to be a distressed wife. You may think not; but you will, because I tell you so. Now I give you fair warning, that I have made up my mind to put distressed wives down. So don't be brought before me. You'll have children—boys. Those boys will grow up bad, of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I'll convict em summarily, every one; for I am determined to put boys without shoes and stockings down. Perhaps your husband will die young, (most likely,) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the streets. Now, don't wander near me, my dear, for I am resolved to put all wandering mothers down. All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's my determination to put down. Don't think to plead illness as an excuse with me; nor babies as an excuse with me; for all sick persons and young children—(I hope you know the church service, but I'm afraid not)—I am determined to put down. And if you attempt—desperately, and ungratefully, and impiously, and fraudulently attempt—to drown yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity on you,—for I have made up my mind to put all

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suicide down. If there is one thing,' said the alderman, with his self-satisfied smile, 'on which I can be said to have made up my mind more than another, it is to put suicide down. So don't try it on. That's the phrase—isn't it? Ha, ha! now we understand each other.'"

But it is probable that scarce a reader holds this book in his or her hand, who has not analysed all the several beauties and methods of the style of Dickens. The characteristic of his writing is the extraordinary sense of propriety and ridiculousness, —not derived from scholarship, from extensive reading, or extensive thinking (if that word be applied only to long reflective habits)—but from intuitive perception, from an abounding premonity of disposition, and that wonderful clairvoyance of the loving soul, by which harmonies or dissonances are best brought home to the understanding.

And Bulwer, (the world insists on calling him Bulwer, although he will have it, his name is Lytton,) Bulwer makes us laugh too, and well are his writings known: they differ eminently from those of Dickens' Artist and Scholar. He regards man from an æsthetic point of vision; he dissects men and opinions; he never puts men or things in the same ludicrous relationship. Who ever does or did, he has *formed* a philosophy of men and manners, and things. Ah! these formed philosophies are very different things to those im-

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promptu philosophies, which blaze forth, like the handwriting of God, in the soul. Bulwer, therefore, carries his philosophy into his wit—for it is wit in which he usually speaks, when he calls upon us to smile, saving in the Caxton (a beautiful book, so instructive and truthful, and good and learned, that it has few equals in the volumes of all fiction); but saving in this, he has not made us think too well of man; and many of his wits have a sad heartlessness, very much after the fashion of the Congreve School. We laugh at sayings that imply so much knowledge of the world — so much scorn of it very frequently, and we pity the absence of principle and ennobling character. We feel no little grief that such good things—such vivacity of wit, should be put into the mouths of men who have treated the world badly themselves, been whipped for their bad behaviour, and have therefore agreed to talk their utmost to vilify and scandalise their punishers. Lord Mauleverer, in "Paul Clifford," and that respectable gentleman, the Honourable Augustus Tomlinson, were both of this class, and their view of life was similar. His lordship declares that *opinions* seem to him "to be like trees if they can be made serviceable by standing. Don't part with a stick; but when they are of that growth that sells well, or whenever they shut out a fine prospect, cut them down, and pack them off by all manner of means." It is not at all

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wonderful, that so exemplary a nobleman should very much dislike to see or hear wit employed in the service of Truth. In such an association, it suggests to him a comparison with the wind. He "admires wit as he does the wind; when it shakes the trees, it is fine; when it cools the wave, it is refreshing; when it steals over the flowers, it is enchanting; but, when it whistles through the key-hole, it is unpleasant." His lordship is the verisimilitude of thousands who admire genius, heroism, virtue, piety, self-denial, and all these things in the lump; but they deprecate the insolent hortatory cry, "Be thou virtuous! be thou pious! be thou self-denying!"

At a public meeting, for some political purpose, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, a working man was speaking eloquently, truthfully, and bravely, on the sins of the people in power, and in favour of the rights of labour. A publican, at the bottom of the room, knew not how to contain himself; he shouted, he clapped his hands, he roared "Bravo! bravo!" Presently the speaker changed his theme; he spoke to the working-men of their own sins; warned them that they were frequently the authors of their own misery. When the publican heard this he looked angrily—he turned to the person standing next to him, and giving him a nudge, "Humph!" said he, "I think he'd better leave off now; don't you think he's getting very tedious?" The wind

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began to whistle through the key hole. What Lord Mauleverer is in the world of Fashion, Augustus Tomlinson is in the world of mere knavery and mere show; and, as is ever the case, his opinions are the counterpart of his character. He mourns over the depravity of mankind—himself one of the most remarkable instances of depravity.

"Oh, Mankind! you are like a nosegay, bought at Covent Garden! The flowers are lovely, the scent delicious. Mark that glorious hue! contemplate that bursting petal, how beautiful, how redolent of health, of nature, of the dew, and breath, and blessing, of Heaven, are you all. But as for the dirty piece of string that ties you together, one would think you had picked it out of the kennel." That dirty piece of string, binding society together, is law, and Augustus Tomlinson was a pickpocket. How could he be expected to touch with affection that dirty piece of string. Bulwer excels in painting these men of the world. Mere hard men—men of talent—cold and showy, or clever men, shrewd and cunning. We never had much affection for that old Corporal Bunting; although, surely, he did his very best to amuse us along the lonely road. Certainly he read human nature with a practical utilitarian eye. It is as follows that that worthy ancient discourses to his young master. Every sentiment is worthy of a Hobbes; his words form a perfect exposition of the selfish philosophy.

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"Discretion is a jewel, nay, it is more than a jewel, it is a pair of stirrups. Stirrups help us to get on, so does discretion to get off—ditto discretion. Men, without stirrups, look fine, ride bold, but tire soon: men, without discretion, cut a dash, but knock up all in a crack."

Again he speaks of Love.

"I have been over head and ears in love, but that was before I learnt to swim: love's very like bathing. At first we go down to the bottom; but, if we are not drowned, then we gather pluck, grow calm, strike out gently, and make a deal pleasanter thing of it before we're done. I'll tell you what I think of love, 'twixt you and me. 'Tis not that great thing in life, boys and girls want to make it out to be. If 'twere one's dinner, that would be summut, for one can't do without that; but lauk! love's all in the fancy. One does not eat it, nor drink it, and as to the rest, why its all bother.

"For, to be a man of the world you must know all the ins and outs of speechifying: its words that make another man's mare go your road. Augh! that must have been a clever man as invented language. It be a marvel to to think how much a man does in the way of cheating, if he only has the gift of the gab; wants a missus—talks her over; wants your purse—talks you out of it; wants a place, talks himself into it. What makes

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the parson? words:—the lawyer?—words:—the parliament man?—words. Words can ruin a country in the big house;—words save souls in the pulpit; words make even them 'ere authors, poor creatures, in every man's mouth. Augh, sir! take note of the words, and the things will take care of themselves."

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CHAPTER VII.

MENTAL AND MORAL INCONGRUITIES.

ALL incongruity is ridiculous, but it is in these that the ludicrous becomes artistic and humane;—thus it is that the ludicrous pierces the sophisms of books and the sophisms of life, for our mental and moral incongruities are to be sought for there; sometimes incongruity has been employed to demolish an argument, sometimes to exhibit a character. Dr. Southey has thus ingeniously made the Pig,—an animal not usually thought poetic, to give special lessons on natural theology and transcendental philosophy.

"Again thou sayst the pig is ugly
Give thy fancy scope,
And thou shalt find that no imagined change
Can beautify this beast. Place at his end
The starry glory of the peacock's pride;
Give him the swan's white neck, for his horn hoofs
Shape such a foot and ancle as the waves
Crowded in eager rivalry to kiss,

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When Venus from th'enamoured sea arose;
Jacob, thou canst but make a monster of him.
All alteration man could make, would mar
His pig perfection.
The last charge—he leads
A dirty life. Here I could shelter him
By noble and right reverend precedents,
And show, by sanction of authority
That 'tis a very honourable thing
To thrive by dirty ways.
* * * *
Dirt? Jacob—what is dirt?
If matter, why the delicate dish that tempts
An o'ergorged epicure to the last morsel
That stuffs him to the throatgates, is no more.
If matter be not—but as sages say,
Spirit is all, and all things visible
Are one—th' infinitely modified.
Think, Jacob, what that pig is, and the mire,
Wherein he stands knee deep."

The passage cited lay in the way; but over our whole literature, thousands of passages are scattered, more richly illustrating the position. This arguing in ludicrous images, has a power in it, that, in some degree, resembles that of an expert arithmetician; it is, indeed, the power of almost intuitively calculating odds and evens. The problem is stated thus, and the ludicrous instantly fastens on this, as the answer. Thus Lamare's or Oken's "Theory of Progressive Developement," leaves only the conclusion, that the grandfather of some man must have been a monkey. Sydney

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Smith's definition of medicine, is something like this—"Beelzebub casting out the Devils."

But the perception of the ludicrous has been principally celebrated for the developement of mental and moral incongruities. These are the fruitful sources of the humorous; the pictures of men apparently inconsistent with themselves. The eccentricities of great men belong to this order; so also, ludicrous circumstances, happening in the most solemn places and positions, very much excite the muscles of risibility, notwithstanding their unwontedness and impropriety. It is noticeable that moral incongruity excites our indignation and deep sorrow: not so mental; this, sometimes, excites our sorrow, but usually, simply our merriment. All inconsistency is fit subject of humour. Every inconsistent man is a painting. Don Quixote is a fine mental incongruity; he is sane, yet insane. How wise the advice he gives to Sancho, when he is made the governor of the island; he is a scholar, a prudent, wise, good man; but for this knight errantry, here he appears in altogether a new character. But the writings of the English dramatists of the age of Shakspeare, excepting those of Shakspeare himself, abound in moral incongruities—Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and still more, the writers of that later age, Congreve, Wycherly, and Farquaar. The marvel of this matter is, that while *we* perceive them to be moral incon-

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gruities, it seems that in their age, in this light many of them were so regarded.

In holding manners up to ridicule, comparison may be made by way of contrast, betwen Jonson and Congreve, as the representatives of classes of dramatists, and Shakspeare. Shakspeare does not individualise those moral epidemics, those follies of universal manner, which form the staple of the writings of the men whose names we have quoted. It has been remarked, that Shakspeare does not describe city manners; he does not devote whole acts, and plays, to the evolvement of the affectations, and the follies of the town. He does not hold the mirror up to show the popular charlatan, and hypocrite, and quack. Hazlett indeed finds this to be a fault in the great dramatist—that he does not in his comedy take the highest pleasure in making human nature look as mean, as ridiculous, and contemptible as possible. If we feel contempt for any of these characters, it is for Iago, for Regan, and Goneril, and Edmund; not for the Malvolios and Launcelots; and surely never for Falstaff. The foibles of humanity are handled so gently, that, as in real life, so here we love the owners of them. The extravagancies of these men are their own; and we do not hold men in contempt so much for their own extravagancies, as for aping the extravagancies of others.

The harvest of comedy, therefore, is in the

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advanced state of civilization, in the manners of the town. It is when men yield themselves to be the servants of conventionality and form, "vice becomes a mark of distinction." Vanity struts about, and boasts of its power to put on the speeches, the countenance, and the dress of other people; and, in this state of society, Man is peculiarly exposed to be the tool and the victim of imposture and credulity; not those magnificent, and awful, and awe-inspiring superstitions, which thrill the heart of the solitary in the vast amplitudes of wild nature, but the cogging, dodging, cunning of unprincipled men; and, in times like these, the example of courts, and the pursuits of the noble and the wealthy, give stamp and currency to the despicable and the worthless. We have already said that the age of Pope was the age of the Satirist; and the same times, or the times immediately preceding those, formed the golden age of English comedy. But the comedies themselves, —those of Wycherly and Congreve—are now subjects for satire and laughter. An elegant living writer describes the past of our literature as a disgrace to our national character; its indecency is perpetual.

"We find ourselves in a world, in which the ladies are like very profligate, impudent, and unfeeling men; and the men too bad for any place but Pandemonium, or Norfolk Island. We are

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surrounded by foreheads of bronze; hearts like the nether millstone, and tongues set on fire of hell."*

We feel ourselves guilty of some moral delinquency in laughing, even, at the thick-set absurdities; we feel as if entering into a conspiracy against virtue and social order: but this, with very faint exceptions, is not the case with Jonson, and never the case with Shakspeare. In Jonson, the difference in the description of manners is most observable. We find ourselves in towns, and among strategists; the humour is rich, and flows upon us like a stream, or rather laughs around like the reality of life. Shakspeare lays his comedies in the country; or, if this is saying too much, draws those bold individualisations of character,—those elliptical forms of life where Man lives in the closest connection with Nature.—Falstaff is no exception—his vices are his own. The reign of the artificial, we might suppose, not to have begun when Shakspeare wrote. But Massinger and Jonson abound in the incongruities of the city,—especially the latter.—Volpone and Mosca, Morose and Lady Haughty, Subtle and Sir Epicure Mammon, are all sketches from town life; and admirable are several moral incongruities displayed in them. Captain Otter's account of his wife is good.

"She takes herself asunder, when she goes to

* Macaulay.

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bed, into some twenty boxes; and, about next day at noon, is put together again, like a German clock; and so comes forth, and rings a tedious 'larum bell to the whole house, and then is quiet again for an hour, but for her quarters."

In "Eastward, Ho!" there is a touch which must be Jonson's. The indications of ambition in a citizen's daughter, Gertrude, about to be married to a poor Knight, Sir Petronel Hash. She is waiting for her knight's arrival, dressed in a French head-tire, and a citizen's gown, and addresses her sister Mildred:—

"For the patient look of Sir Petronel's approach, that sweet, that fine, that delicate, that—for love's sake, tell me if he come.—Oh, sister Mildred, though my father be a low capt tradesman, yet I must be a lady; and I praise God my mother must call me 'Madam.' Does he come? off with this gown, for shame's sake; off with this gown! Let not my knight take me in this city cut. Tear't off!" Presently her knight together with her father, and mother, enter; she is at this time once more making enquiries of Mildred. "Is my knight come? Oh, my lord, my husband! Sister, do my cheeks look well? Give me a little box o' the ear that I may seem to blush. So, there—there! Here he is! Oh, my dearest delight, lord—lord! How does my knight?

"TOUCHSTONE (her father.) Fie, fie, with more modesty.

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"GERTRUDE. Modesty, why I'm no citizen now. Modesty! Am I not to be married? You're best to keep me modest, now I'm a lady!"

Thus she almost bursts with inflation and vanity. To her sister Mildred, she says, "Alas, poor Mildred, when I'm a lady I'll pray for thee i' faith!" To her mother, she asserts her precedence. "Aye, mother, I must be a lady to morrow; and, by your leave, mother, (I speak it not without my duty but only in the right of my husband,) I must take place of you, mother."

"MRS. TOUCHSTONE. That you shall, and have a coach as well as I too.

"GERTRUDE. Yes, mother; but by your leave, (I speak it not without my duty, but only in my husband's sight,) my coach-horses must take the wall of your coach-horses."

Standing where they do, the paintings of the dramatists of the periods we have referred to, have a historical importance about them; they are our best references for the state of public manners. Witness the last century, the ludicrous representation, once almost the property of the stage, has been made the property of the novel; the ludicrous side of life has been well sketched by our novelists. Perhaps in these later years there has been too great a desire for the introduction of the comic and the incongruous into general literature—which, whatever may be its influence now, will not,

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perhaps, have a very healthy influence on the mind eventually. The broad grinning countenance of mirth peeps from behind almost every study; the consequence of a too artificial state of reading, action, and thought, has brought about the love of eccentricity—the thirst for the marvellous creations of the human fancy. In the wild huntsman's life, too, your modern civilization, there has been so exciting and rapid a career, that the quiet humour, the operation of ordinary causes of contrast and resemblance, are not sufficient. "Having drank the liquor, let us eat the glass," said Goethe. The literature of an age, always, as a true mirror, reflects the manners and its people; and especially, this is the case with the literature of humour and satire. In an age of railroads, and electric telegraphs, we could not expect readers to doze over folios, or thread their way through the various mazes and meanderings of an argument in such an age. We should expect, certainly, an average proportion of conclusive thinking, with a great deal of inconclusive—a great deal of real excitement. The result of pride, animal spirits, and high intellectual enterprise; and a great deal of morbid excitement, the result of whiskey, opium, and knavery; and this excitement stirs the pages of our modern novelists. In another age, the Pecksniff of Dickens, or the Lord Steyn of Thackeray, could only have been produced upon

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the stage; now they are acting their parts in every railway train; the theatre is built for them in every parlour, instead of calling for the cab or the carriage, to behold the performance of two hours. It is extended at intervals over years; while with the regularity of the "Tatler," or "Spectator" of former days, and with much more variety and boldness, Punch delivers his homilies as farcical interludes.

Of moral incongruities sketched for the present age, we know none finer than those in Hood's ode to Rae Wilson—beyond all parallel the richest developement of the Æsthetics of Humour with which our modern literature has been honoured; whoever does not like it lays himself open to the suspicion that he has detected his likeness in it.—The fawning, canting spirit of time-serving toadyism is speared mercilessly. The men who

> "Think they're pious, when they're only bilious."

The men who

> "have the Gospel in their books,
> And thus upon the public mind intrude it,
> As if they thought, like Otaheitan cooks,
> No food was fit to eat till they had chewed it."

Yet while these are painted thus smartly, you see that the writer loves goodness—loves Christianity. He ties hypocrisy to his horse's heels,

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and trails it round the lists. This piece has never been equalled since Butler's description of Hudibras and his tribe, who

> "Compound for sins they were inclined to,
> By damning those they had no mind to;
> Still so perverse and opposite,
> As if they worshipped God for spite."

But Hudibras is wanting in the loving charity pervading the "Ode." Butler's wit comes too near the Hobbes definition of laughter—the glory arising from the conception of eminency in ourselves. Hood laughs, not in the pity of contempt and scorn, but in the pity of love and brotherhood. It is not glory in his own elevation, but it is compassion to man's bigoted contraction that provokes his laughter. He scourges bigotry till the vampyre howls again, but he does not forget the humanity of the bigot. Shall we read together those two most instructive little social apologues, with which he closes his rhyme?

> "One market morning, in my usual rambles,
> Passing along Whitechapel's ancient shambles,
> Where meat was hung in many a joint and quarter,
> I had to halt awhile, like other folks,
> To let a killing butcher coax
> A score of lambs and fatted sheep to slaughter.
> A sturdy man he look'd to fell an ox,
> Bull-fronted, ruddy, with a formal streak
> Of well-greased hair down either cheek,
> As if he'd d——d and drill'd some other flocks
> Beside those woolly-headed, stubborn blocks,

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That stood before him in vexatious huddle.
Poor little lambs, with bleating wethers grouped,
While now and then a thirsty creature stooped,
And meekly snuff'd, but did not taste, the puddle.
Fierce barked the dog, and many a blow was dealt
That loin, and chump, and scrag, and saddle felt,
Yet still that fatal step they all declined it,
  And shunned the tainted door, as if they smelt
Onions, meat-sauce, and lemon-juice behind it.
  At last there came a pause of brutal force:
    The cur was silent, for his jaws were full
    Of tangled locks of tarry wool:
  The man had whoop'd and bellowed till dead hoarse;
    The time was ripe for mild expostulation,—
And thus it stammered from a stander by—
'Zounds! my good fellow,—it quite makes me—why
It really—my dear fellow—do just try
    Conciliation!'
Stringing his nerves like flint,
The sturdy butcher seized upon the hint,—
    At least he seized upon the foremost wether—
And hugg'd, and lugg'd, and tugg'd him, neck and crop,
Just *nolens volens* thro' the open shop——
    If tails came off he didn't care a feather.—
Then, walking to the door, and smiling grim,
    He rubb'd his forehead and his sleeve together—
'There! I've conciliated him!'
    Again—good humouredly to end our quarrel,
      Good humour should prevail;
      I'll fit you with a tale,
      Whereto is tied a moral.
  Once on a time a certain English lass
Was seized with symptoms of such deep decline,
Cough, hectic flushes,—every evil sign,
  That as their wont is at such desperate pass,
  The doctors gave her over—to an ass.
    Accordingly, the grisly shade to bilk,
  Each morn the patient quaff'd a frothy bowl

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Of assinine new milk;
Robbing a shaggy suckling of a foal,
Which got proportionably spare and skinny.
Meanwhile the neighbours cried 'Poor Mary Ann,
She can't get over it, she never can.'
When lo! to prove each prophet was a ninney,
The one that died was the poor wet nurse Jenny.
To aggravate the case,
There were but two grown donkeys in the place;
And most unluckily for Eve's sick daughter,
The other long ear'd creature was a male,
Who never in his life had given a pail
Of milk—or even chalk and water.
No matter;—at the usual hour of eight,
Down trots a donkey to the wicket gate,
With Mister Simon Gubbins on his back.—
'Your sarvant, Miss,—a werry spring-like day,—
Bad time for hasses tho'! good lack! good lack!
Jenny be dead, miss,—but I've brought ye Jack;
He doesn't give no milk, but he can bray.'
So runs the story,
And in vain self-glory,
Some saints would sneer at Gubbins for his blindness;
But what the better are their pious laws
To ailing souls than dry haw-haws,
Without the milk of human kindness.

We are oppressed as we move along with the burthen of selection. Citation seems indispensable; but when the brightness trembles over the whole of the great sea, it is difficult which wave to catch, as it bounds and dances along. We do not err, however, in saying that it is the prime intention of the ludicrous, when applied as a test to humanity,—not to mock and ridicule the failings, the

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sins, and errors of mankind; but to strike the likeness of each of them, by a Daguerotypic touch; to sketch the abortion, or the abomination, and to hold it up to view in innumerable ways. This may be done, and is done, by the tale, light, lively, and sparkling; by the poem severe in its truthful beauty like Crabbe; or, epigramatical and antithetical like Pope. By the farce or the comedy; by the spray of light fireside conversation, or the compacted and forcible words from truthful tongues in the pulpit, the platform, or the lecturer's table. For the sketching of such portraits needs not to be followed by the loud uproarious laughter; it comes suitably in all places; and ages must elapse before such modes of dealing with falsehood and folly shall be unnecessary.

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CHAPTER VIII.

CONVERSATIONAL AND PICTORIAL WIT.

The lightnings of the ludicrous never shine to greater advantage than in *conversation*. The shocks are unexpected, they spring usually from the impulse of the circle, and the subject; they are unstudied, and, therefore, the greater is the surprise. The pungent saying; the keen and forcible touch of satiric power; the polished stroke—how they leap like lightly-feathered Mercurys from the brain!—ethereal as a spirit, invulnerable as steel-clad Spartans. Conversation is the test of wit, and few abide the test. Most men bring the study of the bookworm, the preacher, the lecturer, into the room, or into conversation; these should be left behind, when the genuine ore of wit flashes and plays around with wonderful brilliancy. For this peculiar power, perhaps, there is no more extraordinary instance on record, than Robert Hall. Of the volumes of wit, ridicule, sarcasm, humour,

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graphic, ludicrous description, which streamed from him, few instances, in comparison, are preserved. In conversation, his powers shone forth with most untrammelled freedom; powers, the exercise of which was forbidden to most of his serious avocations, found here their gymnasia, although in truth they do not seem to have cost their owner an effort, or an exertion in their display. The force of torrent which thus beat down all "the linen decencies of life," derived its momentum from a gentle spring of noiseless propriety. "Mr. Hall," said some one to him once, "I understand you are going to marry Miss ——?" "I marry Miss ——! I would as soon marry Beelzebub's eldest daughter, and go home and live with the old folks." In his early life he was engaged to a Miss Steel; the engagement was broken off: but in company, once, when sitting in a state of comparative abstraction, a lady ventured to display her wit by saying, in a flippant tone, "If I had been polished steel, I might have expected some of your attention, but—" "Madam," replied the satirist, "You may make yourself quite easy; if you are not polished steel, you are polished brass." Even when stricken by mental hallucination, and the victim of pain; when confined in a private asylum, he did not lose his power of retort. A stereotyped condoler called there to see him, and asked, in a whining tone,

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"What brought you here, Mr. Hall?" Hall significantly touched his head, and replied, "What'll never bring you, sir;—too much brain, sir! too much brain!" His power of instantly characterising a scene—a book—a person, was extraordinary. Thomas Paine, writing against the Bible, was "a mouse nibbling at the wing of an archangel." The commentary of Dr. Gill was a "continent of mud." The writings of Owen, "a valley of dry bones." Bishop Watson had married "public Virtue in his younger days, and seemed for ever afterwards to be quarrelling with his wife." The willows at Cambridge reminded him of "Nature hanging out signals of distress," for the general sterility of the scenery. From these illustrations, it may be perceived that Mr. Hall had all the vividness and weight, without the ponderousness of Dr. Johnson. Foster said of Hall and Coleridge, that the former commanded his words like an emperor, the latter like a necromancer; but, in conversation, they seemed to change their characters; there, Coleridge became imperial; Hall—necromantic. His words flashed about with the true vividness of spiritual things, while the words of the poet held on a stately and continuous march. But in conversation, and especially in wit, we demand the aerial fancy: the figures should flit and fly to and fro, like the phantoms of enchantment. Continuity encumbers, and a too haughty demea-

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nour destroys what should be a peculiarity of conversational wit—ease.

The mention of the name of Robert Hall, suggests another property of conversational wit, which may be called *the rhetoric of the ludicrous.* Impatient of words, the *repartee* must be clothed with actions, to be made pointed and impressive.

A young minister, who had relinquished a charge in the body to which Mr. Hall belonged, in order to take a more wealthy charge in another body, met the orator in company. "So, sir, you have left us!" said Mr. Hall. "Ah, sir!" whined the young preacher, "I could not see my way clear to continue with you any longer." Mr. Hall took a pencil and wrote, in very small letters, on a piece of paper, the word GOD. "Can you see that word, sir?" "See that? of course; yes, sir." Mr. Hall put his hand into his pocket, took out a sovereign, and placed it on the word. "Can you see it now, sir?"

Very few men have ever attempted this kind of wit. The instances known to us are comparatively rare, for it demands an amount of self-esteem, confidence, and originality, possessed by few persons; and truth to say, it is not the most graceful order of pleasantry; it seems not only to require readiness of retort, but hardness of character. Swift frequently attempted it, and was once the victim of it. When a present of game was brought

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to him by a boy not peculiarly polite, he invited the boy into the room, told him to take his chair, while he, the dean, impersonated the porter, and places changed accordingly. A tap at the door,—enter Dan with game. "If you please, Mr. Dean, my master, Lord ———, begs your acceptance of this small parcel, and wishes you a very good morning." "Oh! (said the boy,) thank you, thank you, my fine fellow; and let me see,—ah! here's a half sovereign for you." The Dean laid a trap for a most provoking criticism upon his own cupidity.

Sometimes something like this is the only method by which a lesson can be taught; and we are always pleased when some sprightly genius seizes a good opportuuity of preaching to motley folly a good sermon, as in the following instance:—

One of those nondescript specimens of humanity, called dandies, travelling through some part of the country, in his own or borrowed conveyance, was brought up with a "round turn" at a toll-gate, which he designed to have passed without paying the usual fee. When he found himself in limbo, from which he could not escape without "forking over," he inquired of a young lady, who was in attendance at the gate, how much he had "to pay before he could pass the formidable barrier."

"Three pence, sir, is the charge for single waggons," replied the young lady.

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"Three pence is six half-pence, the half of a sixpence, one of the smallest bits of silver in use; eh! young woman—am I right?" said the dandy, feeling in his pockets for his change.

"Three pence, sir, if you please," said the lady.

"In your office of highway*man*, young woman, you will subtract the amount of your demand from this piece, and return me the balance, as conveniently quick as your ordinary locomotion will allow," said the dandy gentleman, at the same time purposely dropping a shilling piece into the mud beneath his waggon. "Ah! there it is in the mud, I declare. I wouldn't dirty my fingers for twenty of them."

The young lady took the shilling from the mud where he had dropped it—went into the house, and returned with nine pence, which she placed immediately under the wheel, where she had taken up the shilling.

"Hillo, hillo, young woman, what is it you mean?" said the dandy. "Why don't you put that coin into my hand—eh?"

The girl replied, "Sir, I found your money under the waggon—there you will find your change;" and as she turned to go into the house, she gave the fellow a most significant smile, and added, "I wouldn't dirty my fingers for twenty of them! would you, Mr. Dandy-*man*?—ha, ha, ha!—there's your change, sir;" and she closed the door.

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The gentleman dismounted—picked up "his coppers," and was off at full speed, impatient to get out of sight and hearing. If he should ever happen to be in this country again, he will take care how he makes change with English girls.

But practical jokes, practical wit, and painted wit, do not please; they usually please neither the patient, nor the spectator. There is a coarseness about all of them; it is as if one should attempt to paint music: hence the impossibility of illustrating the great standard monuments of wit—Gil Blas, Don Quixote, Hudibras. Mere thought cannot be painted.* Very much of the most vivid wit is essentially bodiless and invisible. There is much difference between the pictorial pun and caricature, and the nice ethereal abstraction we call *wit*. We might conceive Ithuriel's spear; and we might conceive, too, the "toad squat at the ear of Eve;" but could any pencil represent *the touch* of the spear? To paint wit is almost to be endowed with the power of painting electricity. Sheridan, in "The Duenna," compares Isaac, the Israelite, —neither Jew nor Christian—to a dead whale between the Church and the Synagogue, or to the blank pages between the Old and New Testament. Let the reader run over in his mind the most celebrated pieces of wit with which he is acquainted, and he will find that wit cannot be represented;

* See Hartley Coleridge's Marginalia, Vol. ii. p. 263.

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it is work for the thought, not for the eye. Even the higher order of puns cannot be represented thus. The work in wit and poetry is purely spiritual,—like sharpness, brightness,—it belongs to the polished lance, and cannot be transferred.

And thus, too, we can both understand why wit, in conversation, should be electrical, and most electrical when the tongue is the only conductor; when there is no strain to give effect to wit by grotesque or unusual action, but left like a current of magnetic powers, to dart and find its way to the understanding. How much of what has passed for wit, tried by this test, we find to be simply impudence. Vulgar and illiterate persons are unable to perceive the finer rays of ridicule; they demand that wit, too, shall be acted to them.—They do not believe in the existence of electricity, unless you can bottle it, and carry it in your waistcoat pocket; or stick it on a microscopic pin; and, as this cannot be done, sceptics they must remain. Thus, it will often be found that broad grins, the merry features, the appropriate action, elicit boundless sympathy and applause; while the quiet, condensed, but most voluminous sentence excites no attention. Indeed, a spark will not fire a millstone, but it will instantly set touchwood in a blaze: and around the coarse and illiterate spirits the fine shafts of the ludicrous gleam in vain.—There is no spirit more subtle, none more powerful,

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none more penetrative, than wit. But light can paint no pictures to the blind; and there are dull spirits who would gaze on Hogarth without delight, read Cervantes without an emotion, and listen to Sheridan without a smile.

In the wit of conversation, it may sometimes be noticed, that we laugh more at the coarseness, the bluntness, the downrightness, than the wit, or the humour of the converser. Physicians appear upon the whole, to have been a coarse race. We have no small quantity of smart, daring answers from them to their patients. To do them justice, however, it must be said, they were usually given to those children of Fashion, whose only diseases were their fancies, and their only business with their physicians the loitering and trifling away a portiion of time. It is subject for ridicule, no less than for serious thought, that there are persons who pass their own time in wasting that of other people; and of this class, the largest section is to be found in the aristocratic circles, the suffering subjects of *ennui*. We have sometimes thought, nothing so likely to effect a cure for these, as a little bold insolence, some smart and daring answer, blunt, and cant. It would waken thought for a moment or two; would provoke the patient to cast away a ludicrous lethargy; and from its very unusualness, make an era in a life dedicated to the most awful of all pursuits—nothing to do.

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Sir Richard Jebb was one of these rough physicians, very harsh in manner. He said to a noble patient, to whom he had been very rude—"*Sir, it is* MY *way.*" "Then," replied the patient, pointing to the door, "I beg you will make *that* YOUR *way.*" Sir Richard was not very nice in his mode of expression, and would frequently astonish a patient with a volley of oaths. Nothing used to make him swear more than the eternal question—"What may I eat? Pray, Sir Richard, may I eat a muffin?" "Yes, madam, the *best thing* you can take." "Oh, dear, I am glad of that. But, Sir Richard, you told me the other day that it was the *worst* thing I could eat!" "What would be proper for me to eat to-day?" says another lady. "Boiled turnips." "Boiled turnips! you forget, Sir Richard, I told you I could not bear boiled turnips." "Then, madam, you must have a very vitiated appetite." Sir Richard being called to see a patient, who fancied himself very ill, told him ingenuously what he thought, and declined prescribing, thinking it unnecessary. "Now you are here," said the patient, "I shall be obliged to you, Sir Richard, if you will tell me how I must live, and what I may eat, and what not." "My directions as to that point," replied Sir Richard, "will be few and simple. You must not eat the poker, shovel, or tongs, for they are hard of digestion; nor the bellows, because they are windy; but anything else you please!"

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Dr. Ballie was another of these same sharp operators. He was once called in great haste to see some noble lady, when his time was especially valuable. To his great annoyance, he found the lady only affected with her whims and fancies; to his still greater annoyance, she kept him very long, describing imaginary complaints; at last, he escaped; he reached the hall—had seized his hat and umbrella, and was just about to step into his carriage; the footman appeared—the lady begged the doctor to step up again. "Oh, my dear doctor, I forgot to ask you, may I have some oysters when I return from the opera this evening?" "Oysters, madam," roared the doctor, "yes, yes, certainly! shells and all!"

In that bluntness, that downrightness of wit, however, we have sometimes thought that, of all people, the Quakers, (or to give the more respectful, as well as truthful epithet,) the members of the Society of Friends excel, in the simplicity of their character, especially when friends indeed. They glance immediately into a fallacy, or a character. Numerous instances are on record; but, any one who has moved in their circles, and observed their hereditary caution, not to say suspicion of character, which makes this privilege enjoyed by few, will have noticed that their invariable honesty of speech often holds them between the extremes of bluntness and wit. What surprises us is, that they

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speak so literally; they pounce upon a question in their reply to it.

There was one once examined before court, not using any other language than "thee," "thou," and "friend," who was asked by the presiding judge,—"Pray, Mr. ———, do you know what we sit here for?"—"Yea, verily, do I," said the Quaker, "three of you for two dollars a-day, and the fat one on the right, for one thousand dollars a-year."

Everybody remembers the Friend passing along Wapping, and hearing a sailor swearing most vehemently and blasphemously, effectually stopped his mouth by saying,—"Swear away, till thou gets all that bad, black stuff out of thee; for thou canst never go to Heaven with such stuff in thy heart."

Another, meeting a lady in mourning, disconsolate in face, and dark in dress, long after the death of her husband, said, "What, then, thou hast not forgiven God Almighty yet?"

One invited a Primitive Methodist minister to dine with him, who called to beg for some money. The Primitive Brother made more free than welcome. He talked loud—he strode about the room—he spat in the grate; and, at dinner, he held his plate over the table, and gruffly asked for more, saying, he supposed it was "Liberty Hall, cut and come again!"—"I tell thee what it is, friend," said the Quaker, "thou mayest cut as soon as

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thou likes, but I'll take good care thou dost not come again."

It is an interesting circumstance in the History of Wit, that it has sometimes gleamed as brightly from lips about to be closed in death, as ever from the most gay assemblies of the living. The ruling passion has ever been said to be strong in death. Wits have been fond of indicating and satirising it, —and life shows it. Men die as they have lived. Those who quarrel with the manifestation of the ruling propensity of the mind in the best hours of life, would have men to play the hypocrite in their last hours. The last words of men have usually been synonymous with their life-long character: the last words of Rabelais were quite in keeping with that wild jesting, that torrent of merriment, that flowed and flashed from his lips and pen in the hey-day of his life. Whether he left that remarkable will sealed up, with the three articles, "I owe much—I have nothing—I give the rest to the poor," may be doubtful; more probable is the story, that when some persons importuned him to sign a will, bestowing upon them legacies exceeding his abilities, he, to be rid of them, complied.—They then asked him where they should find a fund answerable to that he gave. "As for that," said he, "you must e'en do like the spaniel—look about and search." His last words, however, were most characteristic, and have become proverbial;

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they were uttered to the page of the Cardinal Bellay. "Tell my lord in what circumstances thou findest me; I am first going to leap into the dark. Let down the curtain—the farce is done." This is quite in character with the life of the great Frenchman. For ourselves, we would wish to draw the curtains around us with more composure and decency, yet smile cheerfully while they closed us in. The innocent mirth of Sir Thomas More upon the scaffold looks much more beautiful; it was quite in keeping with his cheerful life. As he mounted to the block, he said, merrily, "Master Lieutenant, I pray you see me safe up; and for my coming down, let me shift for myself." His last words were a humourous allusion to his own innocence, and the caprice of the king who had ordered his execution. He besought the executioner to wait until he had "removed his beard, or that had never offended his highness." These ludicrous allusions were consistent with the life of this great man. The lambent fires of his wit and pleasantry had been wont frequently to play amidst the decisions of points of law. The light of his quiet humour shone forth repeatedly amidst desultory studies. To him the seriousness of death was but one degree more present than it had been for years. Solitude, study, and devotion, had accustomed him to the full view of it. The lively words came as naturally from his cheerful lips, as

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the graver sentences of martyrs not more noble.—And the same remarks apply to the philosophic courage with which Raleigh bowed his neck to the block. A man, indeed, wonderfully inferior to More, in both the purpose and the purity of his life; yet he also carried the perception of the ends of life, combined with the grasp of expression, which had introduced him into favour, and kept him there—at the court of the Virgin Queen,—to the scaffold. "When, Sir Walter, will you cease to be a beggar?" "When your majesty ceases to be a benefactor." In those days, we looked upon him as a sad picture of magnificence and meanness. Years have swept along, and they have brought the scaffold, and the gleaming axe; but they have also brought a more vivid insight into the hollowness and the meanness of things, and men. He sees the ludicrousness of that cowardly fear of death, which haunts almost every life; he becomes the consoler of his friends, and speaks to them with quiet, cheerful humour. "Why, the world itself," says he, "is but a larger prison out of which some are daily chosen for execution." The old soldier had heard of the sad hackings made by bungling executioners, and blunt axes. He is able to judge of the fitness of this tool for its office—it will do.—"It is a sharp medicine," said he, "but a sure one for all ills." Thus has Humour shed its soft light over the shining and the cruel steel; and minds at

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ease with themselves, have made their death words sportive and mirthsome.

[The indisposition of the author has prevented him from extending the present subject: which, however, will be continued in a second edition. A few suitable sketches, which were some time ago written by the author, are now added to complete the volume.]

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SKETCHES.

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BAMBOO AND BAMBOOZLE.

It is not likely that I shall ever forget my two old schoolmasters. A curious pair of Siamese twins they were—inseparable—two incorrigible bachelors, confirmed in ancient ways and observances: yet had they the most distinct characters describable. Truth to say, they are both associated in my mind with recollections and emotions not of the tenderest kind; yet were they both in my school-days, to all of us fellows of the first class, more frequently a source of hearty joke and jest, than of trembling awe. At this distant day they seem to be the representatives of classical and mathematical scholarship, but withal invested in such a ludicrous, though most symbolical drapery, that I purpose making them a source of instruction to my readers.

We called our senior master, Bamboo: he was a stern, grim-looking pedagogue, and he placed unqualified faith in the salutary and healing virtues

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of that Indian cane which gave him his patronymic, because he was never seen but it was also beheld flourishing in his hand, or waiting the sanguinary hour, in awful repose, beneath his arm; walking in the garden, or sitting on the exalted bench, he was never without it: he stood behind us, and pointed to our copies with it; it went to church with him, far more regularly than his prayer-book; he was often seen without the one—never without the other,—and he seemed the very sort of character to believe in bamboo. His eyes were small, grey, and twinkling; his nose was large, red, and carbuncled. We were wont to prophecy, in the morning, the terrors of the day; for when his nose wrinkled with nervous irritation, and his small eye shot rapidly round the room, we were certain they meant mischief,—nor would it be long before he "shook his portentous cane, and gave the nod." There was no eloquence in his diction: his words were few, concise—awful.—There was no formality in his punishment; no one knew on whom, or on what part, the blow might fall; it was always seconded by a most determined will. It was a "crowning mercy" in those days, if the blows were prefaced by a word,—we never expected a speech,—for, not unfrequently pell-mell they came—thwack, thwack, thwack, over shoulders, or knuckles, or back, or that still more delicate, but unmentionable part. There

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was, in all these cases, a reservation of strength, and all that we heard was the asthmatic "ugh, ugh, ugh." Great works go on in silence; and frequently we are not aware of the tremendous embryo until it springs to light. Alas! we frequently knew not that old Bamboo meant mischief, until we heard the loud and wild cry (perhaps our own) in shrill treble to the deep base of the resounding cane, disturbing the silence of the schoolroom.

But a very different character was the partner of "old Bamboo:" tall, graceful, elegant—first impressions always said, what a *nice* man! He was an M.A. too. Old Bamboo did not wear, if he possessed, University honours; yet somehow I thought then, and I think now, that the M.A. was a less worthy teacher than his bluff and surly companion; we were wont to call him "Bamboozle." He ever made it a source of special boasting, that he never, except in cases of the last extremity, used the cane; and in truth it was never seen in his hands in the ordinary hours of life. He professed to feel a sort of holy indignation at the retention of corporal punishment in schools; he longed to see it abolished, and condemned himself for want of moral courage in not abolishing it; he was rapid in his movements, had a full, inexorable, hazel eye; yet this benevolent man used the cane four times as frequently as old Bamboo. But what

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made the matter most annoying was, that every caning which he inflicted was always prefaced with an oration, full of plaintive apologies, and elegant deprecations; and, following the rhetorical course, he always reserved the force of his passion and his argument for the close: "Master Sinclair, I am *exceedingly* dissatified with your translation of Cæsar, it is *exceedingly* painful to my mind, that those choice, and elegant, and forcible words should be thus barbarised, so to speak, and lose their freshness and vigour;—it is a painful duty (Blandford, fetch me my cane)—to allow such marked negligence to pass would be an insult to the ancients.—You know how I dislike this method of punishment, but it must be (thwack, thwack, thwack)—and allow me to observe, Master Sinclair (thwack), that you are a little Gothic cub (thwack), and wholly unfit to penetrate into the graces and beauties of Latin propriety"—(thwack, thwack). "Master Burton, the duty I owe to society impels me to say that your progress is disgraceful; and although it breaks my heart, I must thus signally punish you in the presence of the whole school." Master Johnson, forgive me if I intimate to you, in the most courteous language imaginable, that you are pre-eminently gifted as a dunce; and it will be my solemn duty, this afternoon, to administer the condign infliction of this cane." Did we not well to call him Bamboozle? Even as the

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cat watches the mouse, before the last fatal spring, gently tantalizing with her paws, so did our tormentor exult over us with a sleek and benevolent sympathy, before he struck into us the fangs which lacerated our quivering flesh. So much for schoolboy days.

But, since I have left school, my two old masters have seemed to me illustrations of a good many qualities?—in fact they have represented to me the ancient and the modern rule of things.—Of old, the world was governed by Bamboo; now, on the contrary, we have, indeed, the reign of Bamboozle. The ancient *regime* was a Bamboo despotism; the modern, with all its excellencies, has frequently the appearance of a Bamboozle one. It is truly astonishing how much you may do towards fettering people, by a right disposition of words. The largest amount of liberty, sometimes, under a monarchy, seems much less so than an equal amount of serfdom would, under a republican form of government. Steel ornaments for the wrists are called handcuffs,—good ones are called bracelets. People have not much objection to slavery if you erase that rather awkward word, and substitute fashion. Everything, fortune,—fame,—honour, to a very great degree, consists in a clever arrangement of words. The highwayman meets you on the public road, and says, "stand and deliver!"—he is a ruffian, and, taken, he is

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transported for life beyond the seas. Stupid fellow, why did he rely on Bamboo? Behind the counter the sleek tradesman dresses off his goods with ten thousand imaginary and fictitious virtues, and you surrender your purse although you have no earthly need for the goods. Your friend asks you (poor lamb, that you are) to accept a bill for him, or to become his bondsman for a note of a hundred pounds. How much better, how much more civil this is than rude and vulgar robbery. Of old, force dwelt in feudal castles, and every turret and tower contained its grim wardens for holding in check the surrounding peasantry by the force of bamboo; but now, from agricultural fields and in city factories, force is for ever banished, and instead we have the beautiful and just arrangements of trade, by which, however, still, the trade baron, the large castellated monopolist, beats down all opposition, and holds the ravening and the ragged multitudes in check; or rears family mansions, and hands down to succeeding ages immense broad acres and piles of wealth, by a clever disposition of *words*: so that I have sometimes thought that these two made the prime difference in systems of moral philosophy.

Some moral systems are based on blows. It is related that, on one occasion, when good John Wesley was admitting to a class meeting a youthful professor, he inquired of his father, who

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was already a member, "Have you reason to think he loves the Lord Jesus Christ?" And the father, who seems to have had no notion of any pathway to the religious life but through the skin, replied, "Aye, aye, he ought to do; he's been flogged often enough." Here was a worshipper of bamboo; and glorious S. T. Coleridge tells us that when he was at school he ran away, perhaps repelled by the tyranny of the master, (perhaps moved by some glimmerings of those eccentric fires which waved before him through his whole life long) he ran away, and sought to serve a shoemaker. Soon was he brought back, yet might he have escaped the solemn rod of those old days but for one unfortunate answer given in the course of inquisitorial investigation. "Why," said the stern pedagogue, "why, sir, did you run away?" "Because, sir—because—because, I'm not fit to be a minister." "And, why," continued Bamboo, "Why do you not want to be a minister?" "Because,"—(oh the horror that must have electrified the auditors)—"Because, sir, I think I'm an Infidel!" The master condescended no reply "but thrashed me," says Coleridge, wisely, as I believe, "soundly, as I well know." Fine illustrations these of the dominion of bamboo in matters of faith. Most of my readers have read in Sismonde's Literature of Europe, the language of

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Izarn, the Dominician missionary, inquisitor, and poet.

"As you declare you won't believe, 'tis fit that you should burn,
And as your fellows have been burnt, that you should blaze in turn;
And as you've disobey'd the will of God and of St. Paul,
Which ne'er was found within your heart, nor passed your teeth at all;
The fire is lit, the pitch is hot, and ready is the stake,
That through these tortures, for your sins, your passage you may take."

Let no one suppose in these lines a satire: they were written in all seriousness, and the pleasant and comforting doctrines and references they contain, were commended to the attention of the heretics of that day; so insane then, so insane still is, the conviction, that the wave of the bamboo, the terrors of the sting, and the stroke of force, could compel the conscience, the intellect, or the affections.

A large proportion of what passes for philosophy, for religion, for necessary refinement and propriety, now-a-days, deserves no better name than bamboozle; the wranglings of the schoolmen, the squabblings of the sectaries, the delicate divergencies of fashion and of etiquette, all the robery and the raggery of sham; the bedizenment of false ornament and pretence, the profession of exuberant philanthropy, the parade of liberty,—it is a sad thing to say it, and to think it, but this is the

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meaning of many of the world's prettiest phrases and politest speeches; mournful, mournful!—but not infrequently the involutions of legal learning—the outbursts of oratorical passion—the phrensy of the pulpit, the senate, the platform, and the bar, come to this. When I peruse the varied writings and problems of the clever casuists of all ages, I am compelled to wonder, how much they believed of all that they distilled into such complex language; for reading, I am lost in the befogment and subtilty, alike of their thought and their style;—bewildered, evidently, themselves, it is not strange that others were bewildered in reading them; what they wanted, however, in perspicuity they made up in pertinacity. I have generally found, that those who were, most unquestionably, in a mental fog, demanded of you most boldly that you should declare your belief that they were surrounded with peculiar evidences of extraordinary light; but when a man demands of you to subscribe to the clearness of the medium in which he lives, when it is obvious he is in the dark, we do not need the world to attest what the world very well knows. I am never so suspicious and doubtful as to whether my neighbour has eyes, as when I find him travelling about, over our whole village, to persuade every body that whoever is blind,—the fact about which there can be no doubt,—he, clearly enough, sees.—

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Poor man! or men indeed, for we have many of them in our village.

Literary men, and their writings too, are diversible into the Bamboo and Bamboozle schools. There was dear, dogmatic, grim, growling, Samuel Johnson: strangely enough, he seems to have included the two characters in one. Bamboozle was the characteristic of his pen; bamboo the undoubted attribute of his tongue. His pen, that tortuous, tricksy thing, that only inculcated moral duties and principles, as if they were the tergiversations of folly and of falsehood—good morals, perhaps, if translated into English, and spoken plainly. With a sincere respect for the old literary boor, arising from admiration of his private character and his individual honesty, I always read his writings with the impression that I am taking counsel from a man who would systematically overreach me. Most of the essays and writings of Johnson are timid, bookish, perverse, and never rise to the transparency of the glorious English he so much despised. But Johnson in the parlour was tyrannic, rude, daring. His famous speech upon the Americans, when the United States were struggling for their independence, is a specimen of his general coarseness. "Sir, they are a race of convicts, and ought to be thankful that we allow them anything short of hanging." Genuine Bamboo, that; you can hardly tell, in reading

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Boswell's life of him, whether he had a more supreme regard for justice than injustice. Like all of the race of Bamboo, he was thick-skinned to all the abstract questions of humanity and of man.

The finest specimen that modern times have given to us of Bamboo penmanship is in our gifted Thomas Carlyle, who would rule us all indeed with a rod of iron, or—bamboo; and fancies that the world is not punished enough; who thinks the lot of South American negroes a singularly blessed one; who would shoot dead and rid the earth of the men refusing to work, and cut out the tongues of poor fellows prone to over much talk. Beyond question, the idea that our eloquent friend has formed of the world is, that it is simply a place to be punished in, and he pours out the full torrent of passionate invective on the poor unfortunate dreamers, who really did not apprehend that a day or two of enjoyment and happiness might be found in some green nook beneath the stars. Stern teacher, indeed, yet evidently unveiling to us much of the meaning and the mystery of life. The lessons of Nature and of Wisdom are stern, but withal conveyed in no coarse, harsh spirit or language; there is ever a pitying tenderness in all her instructions; sorrowing love and pity brighten through the tearful eyes of the monitress; the vocation of instruction has been made to assume an unseemly appearance of repelling sternness.

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How is this, when love attends us in every step of the way, and the charm and the delight of truth freshen on every page we read, and give new delight, as from the little spot of vantage ground gained we look on difficulties conquered in the valleys below?

The two characteristics we have noticed, are opposite manifestations of the same spirit: if sometimes mailed and helmed,—with lance in rest, or sword unsheathed,—it plays the tyrant in one day; in another,—sly, subtle, cunning,—it coerces by the infliction of cruel and inequitable laws; and, under pretence of guarding the liberties, which in the old day it violated, taxes beyond all sufferance the poor victim-subject. The old method was the sword, the modern is sheepskin;—but the last is as cruel as the first. Somebody has said, that a slave is only a tyrant turned inside out; and the man who descends to bamboozle, seeks the same end as he who applies to the energetic and vigorous bamboo. To be sure it is almost useless now to apply to the latter potentate, for he is out-voted almost the whole world over—there is a growing distaste for all the associations and the implements of the school of force; but Force is a clever fellow, and will so cover his character—with the dexterous subterfuge and the ingenious equivocation—that his designs may be as well served with the smooth visage and the glozing tongue, as with the bois-

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terous voice and the hectoring demeanour; for Bamboozle has many a slow, sure, wasting power. We think of the power of tyranny only in the gruff demeanour of Oriental kings,—in the grim towers of feudal oppression,—in the merciless press-gang,—in the bloody horrors of the battle-field; but, while prisoners waste an existence in dungeons for debt,—while bills and acceptances, like man-traps, lurk temptingly in every counting house,—while railway panics spread consternation and affright through the whole kingdom,—while weakness subdues strength into quietude and stillness, and the millions of the cities sit, in the mournfulness of despair, beneath the noddings and the willings of the haughty one, who shall say that, in our times, Bamboozle is not as powerful and cruel as the ancient Bamboo?

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THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF CRUTCHES.

CALLING the other day upon an old friend, who had some time before met with an accident which had disabled him, and compelled him to betake himself to crutches for support, I was surprised to find that his sticks had never been thrown aside; the poor fellow was afraid to take a single step without his crutches. He could not go across the room without them; he did not dare to step into the street without them; the old fellow did not know how healthy he was; but there, obstinately, pertinaciously, he must shamble along on his crutches; a stick, in the street, would have served every purpose, and, in the house, even that faint support was not in the slighest degree needed.—But so he moved through life; and as he went, he grumbled out, "I'm weak, sir, very weak, you see—I can't do without this." "Ah! sir, 'twould be a great blessing if I had the use of my limbs,

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as you have."—"Oh, ma'am,"—a long gasp—"well, well, God's will be done." And so, from that day, the poor creature used his crutches, and talked of his crutches, till the idea had made him a hypochondriac, and martyred him to its power. To hobble had become an essential part of his life; he would have felt dissatisfied with himself, could he have gone alone; to talk against his crutches was to enter into a conspiracy against him. I ventured to throw out an expostulatory hint:—

"Now, don't you think that those things could be given up? Why, you're only weak because you don't struggle to be strong; now, take my arm—there, there. Now you see you can go without crutches."

Well, I got him to budge a step or two; but I believe ever since he has had a suspicion of me: he looks at me, and shakes his head; he always seems demure when I approach him. If he tries to rise before me, he firmly compresses his lips and teeth together, saying, as plainly as silence can say, "You see what a state I'm in, and yet, you wicked dog, you want me to give up my crutches."

An able-bodied man stumbling through the world on crutches! Once for all, let us admit that it is the most solemn sight the eye can rest on; yet it is not an unfrequent and uncustomary one. Get a man into the habit of hobbling on crutches at all, and the habit will gradually become necess-

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sary to him, and he be loth to give them up. And how can strength grow, and how can the body become pliant, and muscular, and powerful, on crutches? Thus the weak become more weak, and the incapable yet more incapable. It is a glorious moment when a man breaks a crutch, even although it be on the head of the one who persuaded him to use it—when he determines to walk along the level road in his own strong purpose and power—when he betakes himself to the work of mountain-climbing, and leaves his crutches behind him at the inn where he slept the last night—when he determines to be imposed upon, and to impose upon himself, by wooden helps, no longer. Some men have been in health, all their days, and have never known that they are strong; but to the weak man, who has feared to take a step by himself, to the man whose religion it had been to believe that he could not walk alone, it is a moment of high exultation, when the winds of heaven pipe round him, and distant figures before him beckon him onwards, and each turn of the road reveals something new, and each piece of scenery invites to rapidity and energy at such a moment. It is, indeed, a source of high exultation to the man who had deemed himself weak, to be able to say, "But I am strong."

You see the drift of it, my friends; it is a problem rather difficult to be solved; but the proba-

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bility is, that every one of you, with this book in your hand, is also leaning upon crutches.—The lesson of self-reliance, of independence, is both holy and noble; and yet, alas! almost every soul you meet has its own appropriate crutches; and, still further, it is not an unfrequent occurrence that the weak attempt to persuade, and sometimes do persuade, the strong, that they are too weak: and, for very company's sake, try to convert them to crutches. So we have seen a lop-sided man, as we should say—a man with a "moral squint,"—and this man has really contrived to get an idea, to fetch up from the unfathomable depths of somewhere, a prejudice, a notion, a whim—let us suppose it a truth; very soon he has exaggerated it—distorted it till it grows into a huge, knotty, gnarled branch of an error; then he cuts it into shape and primness, lends his whole weight to it, makes himself a crutch of it, sets up a crutch shop, and offers—good, benevolent citizen that he is—to make you crutches, too, for a price; but if you will not buy, the mischief of the matter is, that he stands at his door, and lays about him, with strong, hearty blows, upon all who go to other shops. He must not only have a crutch himself, and have full liberty to lean upon it, but you, and everybody else, must lean upon that particular crutch too, or you shall have woeful blows. Go into my

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library, and fetch me down that truly direful history of the battles of the schoolmen, or the history of the middle ages, and read me the battles of the Guelph and Ghibbeline; or run your eyes over the contending philosophical and religious sectarian squabbles of the day; then what does it all come to? Sum them up, and call them "the battles of the crutches." It seems very probable that if each of these disputants, instead of squabbling about a whim, had exercised freely his own intellectual and moral capacity, the histories of these chivalrous, intellectual, and other battles, had been for ever lost to mankind.

The fact is, men are wisely economical in the use of their legs—hence the reason why they like and use crutches. Mental crutches are an apology for laziness. A great many books are bought and read—resolve me the reason why. Would you not think that there was an intellectual voracity among men—the spirit of intellectual research—an earnestness in the acquisition of knowledge? Nonsense! At least half the books bought, are never either read or cut; and two-thirds of the other half are crutches for lame souls. Men cannot endure that their spirits should be alone; there must be company, although it should be the most frivolous chit-chat of a fashionable novel. Men cannot endure the labour of digging out their own opinions; they must obtain them ready-made,

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from "orthodox" crutch-makers; for it is very curious, perfectly wonderful, to know that there are, among other "patents," "Patent Intellectual Crutch Manufacturers."

What—did you never hear that old story of the Battle of the Crutches: it is English, too, and at a famous watering-place—one of those comfortable and solacing spots whither lackadaisical ladies and indolent gentlemen go to be persuaded that they are all invalids,—and that they may have the pleasure of leaning on crutches in company. Now there were in the town two great crutch depots. The old established shop was Spivy's—the more modern one, Spokey's.—Now, when it is remembered that some hundred or two hundred pairs of crutches were used by the patients of Shamwell Down, it is not wonderful that, often reclining on the couch, or in the bath-room, in all the elegance of indolence, when talk did not flow, and subjects seemed few, that at last the patients came to talk about the fabrication and properties of their crutches. Nothing could seem more innocent, no topic less calculated to excite feelings of animosity, than the relative claims to popular estimation of Messrs. Spivy and Spokey.

"Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love!"

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The more frequently the topic was reverted to, the more bitter became the controversy. The crutches were every day brought to the test of experience. There was that choleric old Colonel M'Grumphy, who complained of a traditional gout; he affirmed the ease and the comfort, the superior character of the wood, and therefore the magnetic virtues of the article made by Spokey;—while a testy old gentleman, a retired lawyer, named Crimp, passed his verdict for Spivy. Very soon the crutches absorbed every other topic: in the bath-room, the news-room, in the hotels, the relative merits of M'Grumphy and Crimp formed the staple of conversation. Every party had its own little coterie; and it is wonderful what a display of argument and eloquence was expended upon the rival crutches. The rival manufactories, too, joined in the warfare; they became the captains of the combat. Papers flew about; M'Grumphy printed a pamphlet, which Crimp replied to, in a manner so grossly personal, that the colonel called him out to a duel, and the lawyer sought shelter from the civil authorities, and the colonel horse-whipped him in the bath-room. The lawyer entered an action against the colonel, while each of the partisans felt his own honour or heroism (for the ladies of Shamwell Down were also in the strife) implicated in this most important controversy. Long was it before the fever subsided, and, to the

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present day, whoever visits Shamwell Down will be regaled with the immortal history of the celebrated combat of M'Grumphy and Crimp, touching the crutches of Messrs Spivy and Spokey.

Perhaps if we were to stand behind a bookseller's counter, and to interrogate the souls of the purchasers, the dialogue might run somewhat thus,—

"Madam, in what can I serve you?"

"Sir, I feel rather weak in my religious legs; in fact, faith will not walk at all. I sometimes have fancied if I were to go direct to heaven for strength and faith, and commune somewhat with myself, I might be strong; but all my neighbours move on crutches, and I want you to furnish me with a neat, respectable-looking pair." And in a day or two you see the lady hobbling along on her crutches, defending them, proud of them, as if she had used them all her life.

"Sir, what can I do for you?" continues the bookseller to another customer.

"Well, sir, I want a good stout political crutch; something that I can lean on pretty safely, and use occasionally on my neighbour's back, without any fear of its breaking."

"Sir, allow me to show you several; here is a fine assortment, sir; this is the Cobden crutch; this is Colonel Thompson's making; and this, sir, is Edward Miall's; and give me leave to say, that if you purchase and use them for a little time, very

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soon you will be able to give up the use of the crutch altogether, and walk quite naturally."

"Oh, pooh, pooh, nonsense; I don't want to walk naturally; none of my neighbours do,—why should I? I don't want to appear singular. Sir, a nice, easy, fashionable crutch; an old English crutch,—you understand me, sir,—with a crimson cushion for the arm; something of the Gladstone and Sewell cut." And away goes the gentleman, on his political crutch.

'Now, sir," says the bookseller, "let me attend to you. What kind of crutch can I accommodate you with?"

"Well, sir, the fact is I have nothing to do, and I don't know how to set about it;" and, before our friend has left the shop, he has filled his pockets with books. They will serve a double purpose; they will effectually weigh down all the powers of his brain, and he will go limping on them, in a kind of industrious idleness, all his days.

Blessings on good books, and on the dear, departed spirits who gave them to us!—they are our companions, counsellors, guides, friends; but even on the best of them we will not lean to the surrendering up our of own proper mental and moral dignity; we will walk arm in arm with books, and chat with them friendly by the way; but we will honour them too much to use them as crutches.

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It will be a rare holiday for the world when all men determine to throw away their crutches; when the dignity—and, as one has called it, the "elegance" of self-help is really seen; take our word for it, we have been shambling and shuffling along now for a good many ages, making the most ungainly grimaces and limpings conceivable. And this has been to a great degree because we have not held our heads erect, and had faith in ourselves and our mental muscles; we will lay it down that, as a general principle, where there are many servants, many helpers, there must be some quarrelling, and to one person, at least, much weakness. In the holding as a most sacred doctrine the individuality of man, and in invoking the man to work out in true heroism of soul, his own opinions and faith, is our only hope from the intolerance of priestcraft, and the bigotry of personal whim. And let no one dread the moment when men shall dare to exercise their mental natures thus; that moment will not only release the man himself, but reverence for his own freedom will teach him rightly to reverence the freedom of all. In a society composed entirely of men moving on crutches, want of self-respect would also lead to want of respect for all. Believe me, my friend, you may do much good to man; you may feed him, give him good laws, give him good books, train him to good manners,—but if you would give him that good which

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sums up all others, here it is,—*publish a crusade against voluntary lameness, and persuade all men to throw away their crutches.*

Yes, I declare to you, I have very often thought that books have degenerated into crutches. Men surrender themselves up altogether to the dominion of a book; they do not take the book, the book takes them. What is the use of a book to you, upon which you lean, to which you become a slave and a vassal? Neither healthy minds, nor healthy bodies need crutches. The diseased turn all things into mere crutches. Preachers, lecturers, books, ordinances, they are none of them aids to developement—they are crutches to limp upon. And thus the whole moral part of manhood suffers.

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WON'T, CAN'T, AND TRY.

It is strange to notice the difference there is in disposition, character, and success, between persons descended from the same family stock. Nobody could suppose that all the three fellows whose names stand up there at the head of this page could be descended from the same great-grandfather. Different as their surnames are, they all had the same family christian name "*I.*" Of the three, Won't was the eldest; a misanthropic, glumpy old man, too, he was, as rich as Pluto, as suspicious as sin could make him; he had large parks, and many a family mansion in which he and his ancestors had entrenched themselves for centuries; the whole world was in movement around him. Old Won't would never budge an inch. But Old Won't had no notion of the heavenly economy of getting rich by giving; many of his possessions were useless to him, and quite unproductive, that might well have turned in every year fifty per

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cent. He hugged everything tightly, and gratified and contented himself with the mere beggarly gratification of having. Obstinacy, ignorance, and selfishness,—these were the old man's chief virtues —for virtues he called them. Scornfully he always passed by the door of the poor sick widow; savagely he grinned and thundered "No!" when a piece of ground was requested of him for a school or a mechanics' institute; in fact, the life of this surly old curmudgeon might be numbered rather by negatives than by years—it was one protracted fit of opposition, one answer silenced all inquiries. "Sir, I'm a blunt man; say a thing and do a thing is my motto; my name is Won't, and I won't." And the consequence was, that there was "nothing stirring but stagnation" in the neighbourhood of the testy old gentleman. The cottages of his tenantry would have made respectable pigstys in the time of Thomas a Becket; and the intelligence and the temperance of the cottagers belonged to the same very bright and glorious age. To all schemes of improvement in which he was requested to lead the way, the answer was, "I won't." "My dear sir, may I beg you to read these documents?" said a neighbour to him once. "I never read, I don't want to read, read I won't." There was only one grim character to whom he said "I won't," who snapped his withered fingers in the leathern face of the old human milestone, and said

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"but I will." It was old DEATH, who insisted upon it, that the old gentleman should step into his boat, and visit the other country. How he fared there, after all his idleness here, who shall say?

A collateral branch of the family of OLD WON'T was YOUNG CAN'T, and a weak, waxen-faced mortal he was, sure enough. When at school, while other boys were, with intrepidity enough, hard at work at slates, Euclids, globes, and grammars, this soulless little abortion looked piteously in the face of master, tutor, and fellow-pupil, and murmured, *I can't*. It was plain enough that for such a character as this, or rather for one so characterless, a mere automaton existence must be selected, but that was difficult; for every profession, even that of poor Flunkey, the footman, required energy, action, soul of some kind or other; and, in fact, many exertions were made to procure for poor Can't some decent situation where he could do without any labour. It was of no use; he shifted to all points of the social compass, but there he stood on the old spot at last. The times the poor fellow failed in business it is just no use trying to mention; he was like WON'T in one particular—all the world seemed to leave him behind. "My dear sir," he would say, "you see this thing is altogether impossible, it is really no use trying: who can compete with these times?" He

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could never do without his proper allowance of sleep. He feared both morning and evening air; they were both consumptive. Then, again, whatever he did he had the happy knack of doing at the wrong time, and putting in the wrong place; and then came the everlasting soliloquy, "*I can't.*" A nice way he had, too, of confusing everything he did. He never knew where he was, and yet in such circumstances he always appeared most at home. I have seen him sitting with a pile of unrevised endeavourings before him, and as I went into the room, he cast upon me a doleful glance, heaved a deep-drawn sigh, and murmured—"Ah! you see I can't!"

He was a very sickly young man too; everything was too much for him: "I can't bear any exertion;" "I can't attend to it now, I have such a sick head-ache;" "I can't do it now, but as soon as I have had my afternoon's nap, then"—There is no doubt about it,—I have had it from the best authority,—he might have married one of the sweetest creatures in all the old country town; it was said she did cast some kindly looks at the stupid fellow; but, luckily for her, when he attempted to put the delicate question, he said—"I can't," and gave it up, in a fit of despair. At last all persons despised the poor wretch, who never had courage for himself or for others; and he was lost sight of, until the other day, in walking through

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one of the wards of a workhouse, who should I see, stretched on a bed, but this very poor fellow. It was evident his last hour was approaching, idleness and poverty had done their work. The nurse stood by his side with a mixture from the doctor, invoking him to take it; he made many a wry contortion of face—"I can't, I can't," he said; his head fell back, and he died.

Altogether of a different stamp, was another branch of the same family, the most modest, yet the most bold of all my acquaintance—"TRY." It was remarkable that, without any of the prophecies of the boaster, of what he meant to do, he always performed more than any one else. You calculated upon his success as a matter of course: there was a rough dignity about his manner that bespoke self-respect, self-confidence, and courage. "Never despair," was his constant motto. Difficulties beset him; he laughed at them, strangled them, set his foot upon them. He had no possession left to him, like Old Won't, yet he has been getting, I should say, well to do in the world; and he both gives more occupation to others, than the old fellow, in the course of the year, and his servants love him more. He had nothing like the money expended on his education that was expended on Young Can't; but he both knows more, and makes what he knows yield him a better interest; for he thinks that knowledge, like money, should be put out to interest.

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I don't know that we so often hear him say, "I'll do it;" but not a week passes, but he says, "I'll try." And he is such a cheerful soul:—I have often noticed, that those people who have the most to do are the most cheerful. While the life of Old Won't was a real burden to him, and was passed in an everlasting grunt—while the life of Young Can't was like a lounge, with the hands in the pocket, face as long as a fiddle and as white as a candle, and the breath only a fluid to sigh with—Try is always merry and cheerful; his very laugh is like the exultancy of conquest. A school was wanted in the town where he conducted his business, but all the people said one could not be erected; said he, "I'll try," and the school was built. Can't was his neighbour for some time; but while Can't was tumbling over mole-hills, Try was climbing mountains; it was observable that he got through ten times the business of other men, and made far less noise about it. There was no setting bounds to the labours of Try; I declare we have not got a good or excellent thing in our village which he did not get for us: he built our school and our chapel—they had never been erected but for his exertions; our news room and our Total Abstinence Society we owe them to him. Some stood by and sneered, some dared him to success—he only said, "I'll try." He has lived a good while here now, and we all know him. The magistrate sits on the

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bench and administers the law; our parson, dressed up in black, makes fine sermons from the pulpit; but although good friend Try is neither parson nor lawyer, neither one nor the other of them win so much love and respect as they pass down the street; people never look at him, but they see a walking, moving sermon; and I am sure our village will never be any better than it is, until all our young men follow more closely the footsteps of "I'll Try."

FINIS.

J. S. Pratt, Stokesley, Yorkshire.

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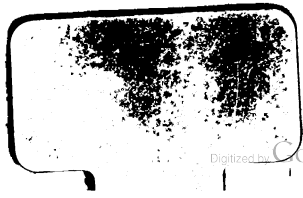
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